

S U M M A R Y V O L U M E

# FEAR OF CRIME

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## FOREWORD



We know that fear of crime can detract from a person's health or wellbeing, may contribute to social isolation and can have a negative impact on business. The fear of crime and its impact on individuals and society is a subject which has not been thoroughly researched before in Australia or overseas.

This important new research is the result of a shared concern and collaboration between the Commonwealth Government's National Campaign Against Violence and Crime, the National Anti-Crime Strategy and the Criminology Research Council. All three organisations identified fear of crime as a priority area needing action.

Until now, research has been largely quantitative in nature, asking very general questions about fear and focussing on whether people feel safe walking alone at night, providing limited information. This new research is qualitative in nature, and delves into the underlying reasons behind people's fears and experiences. It uncovers a complex pattern of psychological, social and physical factors which impact on fear of crime.

The research conducted by Charles Sturt University examines some of the detail about who is frightened of what, where, when and why, and provides promising information on how we might tackle people's fear. It dispels some myths and raises some disturbing new insights particularly with regard to young people's fears.

Implications for policy and practice arising from this research are presented for those interested in addressing this important quality of life issue.

The Commonwealth Government through the National Campaign Against Violence and Crime together with the National Anti-Crime Strategy, will now take these key research findings and implement a number of practical projects on the ground. These projects include addressing fear in a Tasmanian shopping mall and examining fears in a public housing complex in the ACT. Our aim is to identify effective strategies to reduce people's fear of crime in different settings and ultimately to make our communities safer.

I commend this research to you and encourage you to use it to inform your own strategies and endeavours.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Vanstone".

*Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone*

MINISTER FOR JUSTICE

## P R E F A C E

Fear of crime has been identified as a priority for research and action by the National Anti-Crime Strategy (NACS), the Criminology Research Council (CRC) and the Commonwealth Government's National Campaign Against Violence and Crime (NCAVAC). Collectively these three organisations have designed a two stage national project on fear of crime. Stage 1 included a literature review, an audit of fear of crime reduction programs, original fieldwork research including long interviews and focus groups, and the development of workable strategies to deal with fear of crime. Stage 2 will involve the development, implementation and evaluation of pilot projects addressing fear of crime issues to take place in Tasmania, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

Stage 1 was undertaken as a consultancy, managed by the CRC in cooperation with NCAVAC and NACS. The principal objective of this research consultancy was: *to explore the ways in which people conceptualise and manage fear, especially in relation to the risk of becoming a victim of crime*. The findings will be used to develop strategies for managing and reducing fear of crime. This research focusses on fear in public places and does not examine fear in the home arising from domestic violence or abuse.

The Centre for Cultural Risk Research at Charles Sturt University was commissioned by the CRC to undertake Stage 1 of this project, within a six-month period under the guidance of a Project Management Group composed of representatives from the CRC, NACS and NCAVAC. Despite the short timeframe the research is extensive, presented in a complex, two-volume 610 page report (available free from NCAVAC). The first volume contains the audit of literature and community programs, explains the rationale for the fieldwork phase, and outlines some steps to reducing fear of crime. The second volume contains three separate fieldwork studies: a main study examining general fear of crime, and two specific studies looking at fear of crime related to transport and the media.

This summary volume of Charles Sturt University's *Fear of Crime* report has been prepared by the Commonwealth Government's National Campaign Against Violence and Crime Unit to highlight the important findings of the research and to provide an accessible reference for those interested in the issues. It will form part of a series of summary documents produced from our research and pilot projects. While NCAVAC is confident that the main findings of the research are captured in this summary, readers who are interested in delving further into the subject are encouraged to obtain the full report.

This volume includes an executive summary, designed to stand-alone, which contains brief details on the background, methodology and findings of the research and outlines implications for policy and practice arising from the research. Prepared by NCAVAC in consultation with members of the project management group, the policy and practice implications aim to take the research findings forward, providing practitioners and policy makers with pointers for program implementation. The remainder of this volume contains a more detailed summary of the full *Fear of Crime* report and a Conclusions section which answers each of the eight original research questions.

We see this research as the beginning of a process which will be informed by your experiences in the field and our demonstration projects conducted over the next year.

## E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y

**BACKGROUND**

Fear of crime is an issue of continuing concern to governments, academics and those who work in the crime prevention field because of its detrimental effects on society and individuals' quality of life. Much of the research that has been conducted to date has measured fear in terms of perception of risk, and has approached the issue by examining people's perceived risk of becoming a victim of crime, then comparing that perceived risk to actual risk. High levels of fear or perceptions of being highly at risk of victimisation have been assessed as either rational or irrational according to actual risk, based on crime or victimisation statistics.

There has been a need for research into underlying psychological and social factors that cause fear in individuals, and to develop strategies for dealing with this fear. These factors led to this largely qualitative investigation of fear of crime which has produced some very interesting and at times complex results.

Care should be taken when generalising from this research to the whole population or to Australia in general, as the fieldwork participants were not a representative sample of the population and the work was only undertaken in New South Wales and Tasmania.

The principal objective of this research consultancy was 'to explore the ways in which people conceptualise and manage fear, especially in relation to the risk of becoming a victim of crime', with the findings to be used to develop strategies for managing and reducing fear of crime. The researchers were asked to address eight research questions relating to:

- who is afraid of crime;
- what they are afraid of;
- in what context;
- how best to measure these fears; and
- what, if anything, is being done to address it.

These questions are listed in full on page 16.

## METHODOLOGY

The research consisted of three components: a literature review, an audit of programs and fieldwork research.

### Literature review

The literature review was organised according to quantitative and qualitative studies. There were two types of quantitative studies: *descriptive studies* which assess people's experiences of and responses to various types of crime; and *predictive studies* which evaluate factors that predict fear of crime. Qualitative studies and methodologies were examined to ascertain the most appropriate and effective methods for fieldwork into fear of crime. Theories around 'risk communication', and 'risk society', were examined from three intellectual paradigms: empirical, cultural-realist and postmodernist. The review also examined literature about fear of crime and the media.

### Fieldwork research

The methodology for the fieldwork phase was developed from the findings of the literature review. It was never intended that the fieldwork research be designed to cover a representative sample of the Australian population, but rather to investigate how individuals of different ages and genders in urban and rural settings conceptualise and deal with fear of crime. Three separate fieldwork studies took place between May and September 1997: a main (general) study; a transport study; and a media study. The main study had 148 participants including 65 interviewees and 83 focus group participants in Sydney, Bathurst, Wollongong and Tasmania. Both the Transport and Media studies were conducted in three areas, Sydney, the Blue Mountains and Bathurst, and with three generations, teenagers, parents of teenagers and older people. Participants were recruited by research assistants (all local residents) who used their knowledge of the community to recruit interviewees.

Qualitative methodologies were used to provide insights into how people construct their fear of crime, especially in the context of their life experiences. One-to-one interviews explored individual's experiences and beliefs in-depth, while focus group discussions encouraged debate. Issues of time, space and place emerged from the literature review as integral to the ways people construct their fear of crime — public versus private space, night/day, familiar/unfamiliar places, urban/rural spaces. The questions in the interviews and focus groups addressed these issues, age and gender, personal experiences and coping strategies.

Critics of previous fear of crime research have argued that 'fear' should not be confused with people's perception of the risk of crime and their 'worry' about it. This project treats assessment of risk and worry about crime as different (albeit related) concepts and does not differentiate between 'fear' and 'worry' because both concepts are often used interchangeably in relation to responses to crime. The participants were asked about their feelings of safety or danger rather than about their fear of crime.

### **Audit of programs**

The audit of programs collected information on a range of crime prevention strategies and programs in Australia and overseas. Over a hundred were reviewed for their 'fear of crime' content, whether an evaluation had taken place, and any indicators for success. Thirty four were detailed in the full report, representing the best of those examined. Program personnel were interviewed as part of this study. The review was not exhaustive but designed to provide a useful snapshot.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Literature review**

The literature review showed that an understanding of fear of crime, whether quantitative or qualitative, must recognise the interrelation of perceptions and responses, thought processes, values, emotions and behaviours at the individual and societal level.

The literature review identified a number of issues that need to be considered when undertaking fieldwork research into fear of crime. They include issues relating to: place; time; young people and other social groups; gender differences; emotional and behavioural responses to crime and intimidation; public spaces; media; and methodology.

- The research found that questions such as *do you feel safe walking alone at night?*, used in quantitative surveys were hypothetical questions for many people (particularly the older age group) who simply do not go out alone at night.
- Ferraro's (1995) quantitative instrument for measuring fear of crime was found to contain some useful items because it distinguishes between perceived risk and worry, and between a variety of personal and property crimes. The distinction between perceived risk and worry was seen to distinguish between risk assessment and fear.

### Fieldwork research

It is important to remember that the findings from the following fieldwork studies are not designed to be generalisable to the whole population, as the respondents were not a representative sample of the population. Nevertheless, because the research findings show that fear is contextual and individual in nature, a larger study of a representative sample of the population is likely to produce findings similar to those presented here.

### Main study

Many people fear an 'unpredictable stranger', and they are more afraid of this figure in public spaces. People see crime as being potentially all around them at different times in different places. They construct mental maps of public places — the dark alley, the park at night, the river or beach area, the housing estate, the open air shopping mall after hours — according to whether they are well lit, highly or sparsely used at night, or populated by dangerous 'others'.

Respondents feel Australian society is becoming less civil as people lose interest in others and 'community spirit' disappears: institutions such as the police, judiciary and social welfare are seen as failing, while young people's alienation, unemployment and drug-taking increase fear of them as 'unpredictable strangers'.

- All respondents (including young people) see young people in particular as a source of threat in public spaces; young women fear sexual assault and young men see themselves as potential targets for assaults and robberies by ‘homies’<sup>1</sup> and gangs.
- Women see themselves at higher risk of crimes against the person, feel less safe walking alone at night and do so less frequently. Underlying women’s fear of attack is their perception that they are at greater risk of sexual assault — no gender differences were found in perceived risk of non-sexual assault.
- Older people may feel more vulnerable but they tend not to place themselves in risky situations.
- Younger people have less choice (due to their social and economic status, and/or not having a car or driving-licence) about moving in public spaces — where they are confronted by other threatening young people — to reach leisure facilities, or attend school.
- Parents of teenagers are more afraid for their children than they are for themselves, and struggle between a desire to protect their children and the belief that their children should enjoy increasing autonomy.
- Age is an important indicator of perceived risk and worry about crime. Middle-aged respondents perceive themselves as most at risk of property crime and worry most about it, while young people see themselves as at greater risk of crimes against the person and have a higher level of worry.
- While the home is seen as a place of greater safety and control, women are more concerned than men about securing it against invasion. Women are also more fearful of public spaces where they experience regular and disquieting sexual harassment.
- Personal experience was strongly linked to heightened awareness of the risk of crime, and a sense of physical vulnerability was clearly connected to gender and age.
- Frequent experiences of incivilities and harassment can also influence perceptions of risk and levels of fear. These experiences constitute a rational and realistic source of fear which is not accounted for in official crime statistics.

<sup>1</sup> ‘homie’ gangs or ‘homeboys’ are gangs of teenage boys in Sydney who model themselves on the black American ‘homeboy’ subculture, wearing the characteristic back to front baseball caps and basketball gear, baggy jeans worn below the waist, etc. It is important to note however that many other young people also wear this type of fashion but do not belong to any ‘gang’. Young people can distinguish between the ‘homies’ and other non-threatening young people.

- People adopt a range of strategies to manage their fear, depending on where they are and whether it is night or day. They secure their homes against invasion by others, and in public places they try to avoid contact with the ‘unpredictable stranger’, go out in groups, monitor their environment, remain alert and aware of surroundings and other people and maintain a positive attitude, most refusing to assume the victim role.

### Transport study

In the Transport study, interviews with three generational groups revealed that teenagers have the greatest fear of crime on public transport, while parents have significant fears for their children travelling at night, particularly at bus stops and stations as well as on trains. Older people by and large avoid travelling on public transport at night, often giving plausible explanations. However, a minority want to ‘reclaim public space’ from ‘undesirables’ and others argue that they would use public transport at night if it were safer.

- Female teenagers particularly fear sexual and physical assault. All ages of men are suspect because teenage girls are subject to continuous sexual harassment (especially on trains) ranging from looks, through accidental touching to actual assault — a spectrum that is often unrecognised by authorities as a serious and significant source of fear of crime.
- Male teenagers have identifiable ‘rivals’ or ‘threats’ in the form of other youth subcultural groups and they develop specific fear management or avoidance strategies to deal with this. Above all ‘homies’ are feared by teenage boys, because these groups target trains and stations, and students wearing particular school uniforms. Very high levels of fear were encountered among male teenagers in relation to this group.
- Parents fear transport crime since teenagers travel at night a lot for their leisure activities, and where parents can afford to do so they adopt a compromise between surveillance and autonomy by giving their children mobile phones or Cabcharge.

- Older people generally do not travel on public transport at night — especially trains — and few have experience of frightening situations on trains. They are more concerned about direct physical risks such as bus steps which are too high, being knocked over or tripping. However, older people themselves make very clear distinctions between the frail and the not-so-frail, and it is a very important matter of identity for many to be able to travel independently. This group includes some of the strongest advocates of ‘reclaiming public space’.

All generational groups feel train travel is less safe than bus travel; all argue for more uniformed security personnel on trains and the re-staffing of stations at night; and almost all construct ‘landscapes of fear’.

Travelling by train was isolated as one of the most fear-inducing activities in public space — a fear echoed and even surpassed by railway staff (according to the Transport study focus groups with staff) with many guards afraid to move through trains at night. Inadequate communication between train personnel and police and the invisibility of staff leaves passengers isolated and potential targets for groups that focus on the railway system. While railway staff tend to blame fear of crime on the media, they are often fearful for their own family members travelling by train.

### Media study

While the media informs people about crime, many respondents were cynical about the accuracy and sensationalism of crime reporting, recognising media ‘beat-ups’ and over-reporting of certain types of crime in certain areas. However, this type of reporting did increase people’s fears about some areas of Sydney which have become inextricably associated with crime and danger.

Young people believe that the media is not portraying crime situations accurately and want more realistic information about the probability that they could become victims. Blue Mountains teenagers believe the media deliberately under-report crime in the area so that tourists continue to visit, while Redfern teenagers believe the media sensationalise crime in their area and under-report good news. Gossip and other experiences therefore become the basis for estimating risk of victimisation.

There was also a strong sense by young people that the media portrayal of police was biased, showing them in a positive light whereas much of their own experience of police was negative.

Parents of teenagers are concerned that increased exposure to violence through television and movies has made the younger generation in general more callous and less sympathetic or caring.

Parents, women and older people prefer *The Bill* and other British television shows to American police series. For parents this was because of their ‘relevance’, ‘realism’, and the portrayal of organisations in a meaner, more corrupt world.

### **Audit of programs**

In the majority of crime prevention programs, the reduction of fear of crime was an afterthought or an assumed objective within a more generalised program to reduce crime itself. There was often a presumption that if crime is reduced, fear of crime will naturally decline also. The research shows that this is not the case.

The review of programs and strategies, although not exhaustive, showed disappointing results. Very few programs explicitly addressed fear of crime and evaluation of outcomes was virtually non-existent. There were signs of success where a proper analysis of fear took place with relevant target groups *and* a range of solutions involving key stakeholders were implemented.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

There are significant implications for policy, practice and research, which arise out of this groundbreaking piece of research. What follows is a set of preliminary recommendations which can no doubt be built upon by the reader. These have largely been prepared by NCAVAC. They can hopefully be used in future practice when we try to deal with fear of crime in our communities.

The implications break down roughly into two parts: those which relate to ‘measuring and analysing fear of crime’ and those which relate to ‘designing and implementing fear reduction programs’. All of these implications are important for governments, police services, the private sector and non-government agencies to take into consideration when designing programs and strategies to prevent or reduce fear of crime or crime itself.

### **Measuring fear of crime**

1. When hoping to address a population’s or community’s ‘fear of crime’ little will be gained from simply asking the quantitative survey question *do you feel safe walking alone in your neighbourhood at night?*. This will not provide an accurate measure of fear for different sections of the community. Nor will it tell you about people’s actual experiences. Why? In the case of older people, many will have chosen not to go out at night for a variety of reasons (not necessarily crime concerns), so the question is hypothetical for them. For younger people, they go out at night, whether they feel safe or not and often when they feel decidedly unsafe. So ‘going out at night’ tells you little about whether they are fearful or not.
2. Fear of crime surveys should be more qualitative and ask more probing questions about what people fear. They should make clear distinctions between different kinds of crime. It is important to understand the role of incivilities and civic disorder in the creation of fear of crime and therefore ask specific questions about low level incivilities, harassment and abuse. Questions should be tailored to reflect the life experiences of women, younger age groups and people from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Only in this way will we get to the heart of the problem and therefore provide indicators for solutions.
3. Questions should also be asked regarding people’s actual behaviour in addition to their concerns and worries, as we then gain an insight into people’s tolerance levels and personal strategies used to address their fears.

4. The research shows clearly that people's experience of fear of crime cannot be isolated from location and their own personal histories. Questions should therefore be asked about where and when people feel fearful as we know fear is situated in time and space. Recognition of people's 'lay knowledge' should be paramount. Questions should also be asked about fear for 'others' not just the person being questioned, for example one's children.
5. Generalisations should be avoided across and within groups or sections of a community, as experiences and fears differ markedly depending on age, gender, race and life experience.
6. Further in-depth qualitative fear of crime research is needed with different cultural and ethnic groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those with disabilities. Their experiences of crime, incivility and fear will likely differ from the majority of respondents interviewed for this research. Their strategies to cope with their fear may also differ.

### **Designing and implementing fear reduction programs**

The Charles Sturt University researchers highlighted some of the elements they thought important regarding future fear reduction strategies:

- develop a clear understanding of the causes of fear in the target group/area;
- deal directly with the immediate, visible source of the fear;
- deal with the underlying social factors that led to the manifestation of the fear;
- provide support for victims; and
- improve the environment to reduce opportunities for victimisation.

They also outlined nine steps which we have reproduced in an appendix to this summary on page 53.

We would like to make these additional recommendations:

1. The research showed that crime prevention strategies and programs do not necessarily or automatically prevent fear of crime, and programs designed to address fear of crime do not necessarily prevent crime. It would therefore be useful to distinguish between measures which prevent crime and those which are designed to purely enhance feelings of community safety.
2. If crime is identified as a problem in a community, fear of crime cannot automatically be assumed to be a problem also. But where fear of crime does exist, it should be addressed.
3. Fear of crime reduction strategies and programs must first establish who is frightened of what, where and why. Then fear reduction must be made an explicit objective of the program with solutions appropriate to the target group. We must also remember that we are not always dealing with fear of *crime* but often low level harassment, incivility and disorder, general environmental decay and lack of community cohesion.
4. Specific attention should be paid to people's concerns regarding their use of public transport and policy makers must recognise the low level harassment and incivility that many passengers experience which affects their feelings of safety. Authorities cannot rely solely on crimes officially reported when developing measures to make systems safer. Attention should also be given to people's experience of their 'whole journey', as fear often begins when a person leaves home and waits at a bus stop or train station, and it does not end until the final destination is reached.
5. Separate analyses should be made of people's use of the media as a source of knowledge of crime in their area as compared to other sources. The research has shown that people gather information about crime from a range of sources and that they regularly filter information received through the media. Consideration should be given to working with local media outlets in an area to discuss the way crime concerning particular places or groups of people is reported.

6. Fear levels should be measured for different target groups and then programs to reduce fear evaluated to assess outcomes. Assumptions should not be made that because a program or strategy has ‘worked’ in one location for one target group, that it will automatically work in another. Programs need tailoring to local needs.
7. It may be possible to take action immediately to address certain elements of a community’s source of fear, by undertaking some quick and effective practical measures such as adding lighting to a dark alley, installing a help-point at a train station, or cutting down shrubbery. Prompt action should be encouraged to instil community confidence. More complex problems can then be addressed over a longer period of time.
8. From research in Australia and overseas on successful crime reduction programs we know that single interventions and strategies rarely work. Combinations are more likely to achieve results in the long term. Strategies must also be integrated into existing mainstream service provision where appropriate eg within the normal practice of a public transport system or within routine procedures of shopping centre managers.
9. Consultation and involvement of local people and all relevant stakeholders is essential in identifying the problems and implementing solutions. This in itself may generate ‘community spirit’ and lead to unintended positive outcomes.
10. Where people do actually begin to feel safer, the word should be spread. Successes should be celebrated. The media could be engaged in this positive process.

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

The following sections of this report summarise the three research components undertaken by Charles Sturt University, the literature review, the fieldwork research and the audit of programs. Each section summarises the methodology used in the study, the findings of the study and conclusions arising from the findings.

Finally there is an overall Conclusions section which comprehensively addresses the eight original research questions, and a ‘Where to from here?’ section which summarises the policy and practice implications from this research and the next steps to be taken by NCAVAC and NACS in addressing this issue.

The recommended Nine steps process for reducing fear of crime, is included in the Appendix.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The researchers were asked to address the following questions:

1. Which groups in the community are afraid of crime, what are they afraid of, and from whom?
2. Are all types of people equally afraid of crime?
3. In what contexts are people afraid of crime: eg are people more or less afraid of crime in the home or in public spaces?
4. What is the relationship between being fearful in general and fear of crime?
5. What is the relationship between being fearful and the likelihood of becoming a victim?
6. What do we know about the range of concepts relevant to the fear of crime debate, in particular worry, outrage, risk evaluation and fear in general?
7. What crime prevention methods need to be/have been used to prevent, reduce or manage fear of crime?
8. What is known about the tools that measure fear of crime and the effectiveness of these tools in terms of reliability and whether they affect the fear of crime?

Detailed answers to these questions can be found on pages 44–50.

## L I T E R A T U R E   R E V I E W

### METHODOLOGY

The literature review, summarised below, was organised into separate analyses according to the type of literature or studies available relating to fear of crime. Firstly quantitative studies were examined, summarising and extending, in particular, the work of Hale (1996) which criticised much other quantitative work for failing to differentiate risk perception from fear. The studies examined were of two types: descriptive studies which assess people's experiences of and responses to various types of crime; and predictive studies which evaluate factors that predict fear of crime.

Secondly, qualitative studies and methodologies were examined in order to ascertain the most appropriate and effective methods for fieldwork into fear of crime. This review focussed on Ferraro's (1995) conceptual framework for his risk interpretation model of fear of crime, and on examples of qualitative studies undertaken by Taylor *et al* (1996) and Pain (1997).

The literature review also examined theories around 'risk communication' and 'risk society', from three intellectual paradigms: empirical, cultural-realist and postmodernist. Readers who are interested in this theoretical discussion are encouraged to read the first volume of the full report.

The review also examined literature about fear of crime and the media, with a particular focus on the work of Gerbner *et al* (1980), Gunter (1987) and Sparks (1992). The following is a summary of the literature review which can be found in the first volume of the full report.

### QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Fear of crime became an issue of academic and policy concern because of a disparity between statistics measuring individuals' risk of victimisation and people's responses to questions about their perceptions of safety and fear of crime — the risk-victimisation paradox. Fear of crime can constrain use of public space and public amenities; while parental over-protectiveness can undermine children's ability to become competent adults.

The risk-victimisation paradox claims that people overestimate the prevalence of crime in the community and that they perceive increases in crime that are not supported by official statistics. This hypothesis points to evidence that crime statistics do not support the high levels of fear felt by the elderly or particularly by women (statistics show that women, for example, while at higher risk of sexual assault, are less at risk of random crimes such as mugging than males — especially teenage males). Parents are also seen as excessively concerned for the safety of their children, overestimating the risks of abduction and assault by strangers. Parents are more anxious for younger and female children though it is older male children who are more at risk of assault.

The discrepancies are often interpreted as evidence of misinformation or irrationality: women, the elderly and parents imprison themselves (or their children) in unjustified fear. Expert communication models aim to provide a more realistic picture of risks and to close a gap often blamed on the sensationalist media.

- The accuracy of official statistics and victimisation surveys has been questioned, and it has been argued that women’s high levels of fear reflect experience of assault and harassment not reported in traditional surveys.
- Factors other than incidence of crime contribute to perceptions of risk, including perceptions of the physical and social environment and direct and indirect experience of victimisation.
- The concept of media-generated outrage to understand exaggerated public perceptions of risk provides a framework for considering quantitative studies that relate aspects of media coverage to fear of crime.
- The concept of vulnerability has been used to highlight differences in risk and perceived ability to control a criminal threat, and in the perceived consequences of a particular crime.
- The question of how people balance their need for safety with other needs indicates the importance of examining how people engage with fear of crime in their daily routines. Many quantitative studies depend too much on hypothetical questions such as *How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighbourhood at night?*, whereas many older people and women simply do not walk alone at night.

The perceived failure of quantitative research to understand the meaning of fear of crime in people's lives has led to a growing demand for the use of qualitative paradigms. However, the dichotomy need not be an either/or choice: quantitative work has generated many hypotheses about the processes underlying fear of crime that can be further explored by qualitative research.

### **Measurement issues: fear of crime and related concepts**

There are two categories of quantitative research into fear of crime:

- descriptive statistics that present assessments of risk or fear in response to general crime questions or to items related to specific types of crime or location; and
- predictive models that attempt to predict fear of crime from demographic, environmental and cognitive variables.

Recent studies employing complex statistical modelling techniques with multiple measures of crime related perceptions and responses have shown how a set of constructs related to the fear of crime can be identified and interrelated within a single model that provides a theoretical bridge to qualitative work.

However, the model needs further elaboration and refinement. The *Australian Living Standards* study indicated that 50 per cent of parents of primary children are concerned that their children may be kidnapped on the way to school. What is not clear however, is how high the parents perceive the risk of such an event to be, whether it is a source of chronic worry, and whether it impacts on parental practice (de Vans and Wise 1996).

The model can be extended to include a behavioural dimension. Two individuals who have similar perceptions of their risk of assault may make different decisions about restricting their evening social activities. Constraint on behaviour is also an important aspect of parental fear for their children's safety, not only restricting children's activities but also requiring parents to play an extensive role in transporting children to and from activities.

The community-oriented category of emotional response may best correspond to the concept of outrage, in which the community reacts with high levels of emotion and mobilises for action through public protest and lobbying. Because the media deal in outrage, certain types of crime and victim receive more attention: innocent, vulnerable, random targets are most popular. Media and public outrage represents an emotional reaction to a sense of lack of control over public safety and a failure of authorities to take appropriate steps to achieve it.

### **Which groups are afraid of crime, and is their fear related to their level of risk?**

The most consistent finding in the literature on fear of crime is that women are more fearful than men, both at home and walking alone at night. However, it has been argued those official statistics underestimate risks to women. So the risk/victimisation gap identified by experts may be in part a result of their own ignorance of the scale of violence against women, and that perceived risk reflects real experiences of assault or harassment. The absence of sexual preference as a variable in fear of crime research may also distort risk/fear issues: gay men are four times as likely to be attacked than are males in the general population and lesbians six times more likely to be attacked than other women.

The evidence on age and fear is more conflicting. The elderly may be more fearful of crime than younger adults, but even where older respondents indicate relatively more fear, levels may still be quite low. The under-25 age group is considerably more fearful of crimes against the person, while break and enter, vandalism and dangerous driving are of particular concern to older people.

Fear of crime is generally higher among the poor, less educated and ethnic minorities. Multiple dwellings and a lack of security features in public housing may create more perceived risk.

### **Assessing risk: environmental cues**

People assess their own risk on the basis of environmental and social cues and on knowledge of previous victimisation, whether to themselves or others.

Where people live and who they are is important in determining their fear of crime. Signs of urban decay (abandoned buildings, disrepair, litter and graffiti or rowdy gangs, homeless people and drunks) serve as an indicator of the risk of victimisation.

### **Assessing risk: experience of victimisation**

Experience of victimisation is another potential source of risk information, but people who have experienced victimisation are not necessarily more fearful than those who have not. Quantitative research rarely takes account of the seriousness of the crime or multiple victimisation, or the possible long-term impact of a single traumatic event in which an individual felt particularly powerless.

Women's experience of non-reported abuse and harassment acts in a similar way to physical and social incivilities as an indicator of lack of control and powerlessness. Fear of rape considerably increases variability in fear of crime, eliminating or reversing gender effects, with 30 per cent of older women having experience of a sexual attack and 84 per cent experiencing at least one form of harassment — experiences that form the basis for women's higher perceived levels of risk and fear of crime (Pain 1995).

Contact with other members of the community makes it more likely that residents learn of burglaries in their local area, so certain places can acquire a mythic reputation as dangerous even though this claim is not supported by crime statistics.

### **Fear of crime: encountering risk**

Individuals vary in their preparedness to take risks and confidence in their ability to handle risky situations. Many women are socialised into vulnerability and their 'need' for protection; while males are socialised into the need to protect. The male perception of their physical strength helps them to approach fear-producing situations more positively. Parents are more fearful for their daughters than their sons and while children are less fearful than their parents, there is a significant association between parents' fear and the level of fear shown by their children.

People also differ in the perceived consequences of risky encounters: the consequences of burglary for the poor and uninsured may be much more long-lasting than for those who can replace lost possessions. Physical vulnerability is an important predictor of fear of crime in the elderly, and women rate rape at the same level of seriousness as murder (women under 35 years of age fear rape more than any other crime).

### **Locations of fear**

Why are people generally more fearful of some crimes and locations than others? While women and children are more likely to be assaulted by someone they know than by a stranger, it is random stranger attack that is most feared. Fear of crime is much greater in some locations than others: one survey found that only 20 per cent of respondents felt safe on the train at night (compared with 72 per cent by day, 82 per cent at home alone at night, and 51 per cent jogging/walking alone at night). Parents show high levels of concern for adolescent children travelling to and from entertainment at night on public transport.

### **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

The literature on fear of crime contains few examples of qualitative studies. The fieldwork conducted as part of the research component of this report used qualitative studies undertaken in the UK by Taylor, Evans and Fraser (1996) and Pain (1997).

Pain interviewed elderly women about their levels of fear of crime in a changing neighbourhood, while Taylor *et al* initially used street surveys in Manchester and Sheffield to identify participants for later focus group discussions about the public sense of wellbeing in those cities.

As a result of all the qualitative studies, three concepts relating to fear of crime need to be clarified:

- perceived risk of crime as opposed to fear of crime;
- official risk of crime as opposed to perceived risk of crime; and
- fear for oneself as opposed to fear for others.

The survey of fear of crime literature established, not surprisingly, that those most at risk of becoming victims of crime are young men from lower socio-economic groups and from minorities. It also established that if the full extent of *unreported* crimes against women were known — and if that were coupled with public acknowledgment of the continuum of sexual violence women experience — then we might have a clearer understanding of women’s fear of crime.

### **Risk**

While the elderly, and particularly elderly women, emphasise risk avoidance in their behaviour — due largely to their physical frailty — others, particularly young men, appear to seek out risk in their choice of public space and behaviour.

While the perceived wisdom is that the elderly are ‘prisoners’ of their fear of crime and that elderly women are most fearful, the literature challenges this idea. In fact, it is those who are economically most vulnerable to crime, and those from visible minorities, who have most to fear from crime and who are most fearful of crime.

Vulnerability, or a perception of it, is at the centre of a matrix of physical, social and psychological factors that lead to a fear of crime.

Hale (1996) found that fear of crime is influenced by a general sense of vulnerability, by signs of neighbourhood decay and by lack of community cohesion. Most of the literature surveyed suggested that improving order and cohesion is more important in overcoming fear of crime than surveillance and security devices.

Crime, and the fear of crime, are less of a problem in a neighbourhood where people ‘look out for each other’ through natural surveillance (when neighbourhoods are characterised by social cohesion, and when the street serves multiple purposes for many kinds and ages of people). Highly visible security installations, surveillance hardware and guards are more likely to increase perceived risk — and fear — of crime. Security bars on windows can increase apprehension among passers-by and among new residents in the area, as well as being fire-traps.

## **Incivility**

The concept of incivility — a perceived breakdown in an ‘acceptable’ quality of environment and ‘polite’ interaction between people who do not know each other — is central to the fear of crime. Many authors comment that it is the ‘unpredictable stranger’ who is most often seen as the likely agent of crime, and the neglected environment as a likely place for crime to occur.

Ferraro (1995) says the literature has established that incivility encompasses the physical and social environments. Physical incivility refers to disorderly surroundings — litter, abandoned buildings or cars, graffiti, broken or barricaded windows — and social incivility refers to disruptive behaviour such as rowdy youths, homeless people, beggars, drunks and inconsiderate neighbours.

Ferraro argues that both forms of incivility are likely to heighten fear of crime, but that their effects are probably indirect. Physical incivility and/or disorder is less likely to be intimidating where there is neighbourhood solidarity.

## **Criminal opportunity/routine activities theory**

Criminal opportunity theory or routine activities theory holds that offenders make ‘rational’ choices about opportunities for crime. Ferraro (1995) suggests that this might also be useful in conceptualising how potential victims use such information in judging their risk of victimisation by taking into account environmental indicators such as broken windows, surveillance or signs of poverty.

## **The media and fear of crime**

The literature notes, and echoes, continuing concern among academics and other professionals about the power of the media in promoting fear of crime. The work of Ian Taylor (1996) and Richard Sparks’ 1992 book *Television and the Drama of Crime* are particularly useful.

The literature is dominated by the intellectual tradition provided by George Gerbner and his colleagues, whose ‘cultivation thesis’ holds that television is ‘an instrument of the established socio-cultural and industrial order that serves to maintain and reinforce the political, economic and cultural status quo’ (Gunter 1987). In Gerbner’s own words

*If you grow up with violent television...then violence simply becomes an easy and acceptable solution to many problems...*

*(George Gerbner, interviewed on ABC Radio 10 May 1996)*

This ‘social control’ model has led Gerbner *et al* (1980) to focus not just on the under-representation — except as victims — of women, ethnic minorities and older people in television drama, but also on the over-representation of law enforcers and legal institutions. Gerbner found that television viewers who watch more than four hours of television a day believe that criminal and violent activities are much more commonplace, have a much greater fear of crime and are more afraid to walk alone at night than viewers who watch less than two hours television a day.

In contrast to Gerbner’s work, the researchers highlighted the value of qualitative media approaches which drew more on context based analysis of everyday routines and experiences. Taylor’s work, which emphasised the use of media as one method of communication among other everyday ‘circuits of communication’, such as children’s stories from school or local gossip, was drawn on for the media fieldwork study, together with Sparks’ work which emphasised the interaction between everyday conversation and the media.

## LITERATURE REVIEW: CONCLUSIONS

It is evident from the literature review that an understanding of fear of crime, whether gained through quantitative or qualitative research, must recognise the interrelation of a set of perceptions and responses, thought processes, values, emotions and behaviours which exist at the individual and the societal levels. Predictive models of fear of crime have identified demographic, environmental and experiential variables that predict responses related to fear of crime. Age, gender and experiences of harassment have all been shown to influence fear of crime. The literature suggests that perceived control over one's environment underlies many of the factors contributing to higher levels of fear. People who perceive society or their neighbourhood as being out of control are likely to be more fearful, according to the literature review, as are those who feel vulnerable for physical or social reasons.

The literature review examined some studies which explore the impact of the media on individuals' fears, and found that heavy television viewing (more than four hours per day), was associated with higher fear levels. The media deal in outrage, focussing attention more on random, vulnerable, innocent victims and sensational crimes such as 'home invasions' thereby increasing fear and outrage at the authorities for failing to provide security. However the literature also raises questions about the level of influence the media has on fears. This was investigated further in the fieldwork research.

A number of issues were identified in the literature which need to be considered when undertaking fieldwork research into fear of crime. They include issues relating to: place; time; young people and other social groups; gender differences; emotional and behavioural responses to crime and intimidation; public spaces; media; and methodology. The following section summarises the fieldwork component of this research project.

There were enough differences found in results from previous surveys to lead us to the conclusion that future investigations of fear of crime must be qualitative and contextual in nature and must not generalise across and within groups such as, male/female, young/old, ethnic groups. Where large quantitative surveys are undertaken, asking hypothetical questions about *walking alone in your neighbourhood at night* has been shown to provide inadequate information on individuals' fear. If these questions are to be used in future they should be qualified, contextualised and supplemented.

## F I E L D W O R K R E S E A R C H

Critics of previous fear of crime research have argued that ‘fear’ should not be confused with people’s perception of the risk of crime and their ‘worry’ about it. This project treats assessment of risk and worry about crime as different (albeit related) concepts and does not differentiate between ‘fear’ and ‘worry’ because both concepts are often used interchangeably in relation to responses to crime.

Using the term ‘fear’ when asking questions of people may also elicit responses that deny fear, especially in men. So the term ‘fear of crime’ is used to refer to an emotional response to the risk of a crime happening to oneself or to others that incorporates elements of fear, worry, vulnerability and loss of a sense of security or safety. Participants in interviews and group discussions were asked about their *feelings of safety or danger* rather than about their fear of crime.

## M E T H O D O L O G Y

The overarching objective of the research consultancy was ‘to explore the ways in which people conceptualise and manage fear, especially in relation to the risk of becoming a victim of crime’, with the findings to be used to develop strategies for managing and reducing fear of crime. The methodology for the fieldwork phase was based on the findings of the literature that identified a number of key issues:

- I qualitative methodologies have not been used enough to address issues of fear of crime. They provide insights into how people construct their fear of crime, especially in the context of their life experiences: one-to-one interviews explore individuals’ experiences and beliefs in-depth, while focus group discussions encourage debate. The methodology incorporates some of the standard quantitative items used in other research, but went on to ask people to explain why they gave certain responses;

- age and gender have been identified as particularly important in previous research on fear of crime, so younger people 16–20, older people 60 and above, and women of all ages were selected for focus group discussions. These discussions took place in cities (Sydney, Hobart and Wollongong) and rural areas (Tasmania, Bathurst region of NSW). While ethnicity and sexual identity have also been identified as important in shaping responses to and perceptions of crime, for the purposes of this research it was decided not to focus specifically on these because of resource and time constraints;
- roughly equal numbers of men and women, a range of age groups and socio-demographic characteristics, and some people of non-English-speaking background were selected for interviews;
- issues of time, space and place emerged as integral to the ways in which people construct their fear of crime — public versus private space, night/day, familiar/unfamiliar places, urban/rural spaces. The questions in the interviews and focus group schedules addressed these issues from a range of perspectives. A separate Transport study addressed the specific issue of travel on trains;
- the media have been identified as influencing people’s understandings of crime and several questions were therefore incorporated on the media. A separate Media study focussed on people’s use of and responses to the media coverage of crime;
- the range of strategies people employ to deal with their fear of crime (and their perception of who is responsible for dealing with crime) was examined; and
- interview and discussion questions addressed their personal histories of crime, knowledge of others’ experiences and everyday routines.

Participants were asked to respond to closed questions and to expand on their answers in a focus group discussion or an interview (discussions and interviews were audiotaped and transcribed). The Transport study drew on the concepts generated by the Literature Audit Report to compare gender and age through focus groups, and to examine the circuits of communication in respondents’ daily activities. The Media study brought formal textual and ‘audience’ analysis together, situating the kinds of crime in people’s daily circuits of communication.

In the Main study:

- there were 148 participants — 65 interviewees and 83 focus group participants;
- 5 focus groups and 25 interviews were carried out in Sydney; 3 focus groups and 10 interviews in Bathurst; 3 focus groups and 15 interviews in Wollongong; and 4 focus groups and 15 interviews in Tasmania;
- more female (69 per cent) than male (31 per cent) participants were recruited in total, because women had been identified as a priority for research attention, as had older people;
- proportions in the long interviews were roughly equal — 57 per cent female, 43 per cent male;
- 23 per cent of participants were aged 16–20, 32 per cent were aged 21–40, 26 per cent were aged 41–60 and 19 per cent were aged 61–85;
- 5 per cent were unemployed, 5 per cent full time homemakers, 27 per cent students, 11 per cent unskilled workers or sales staff, 15 per cent in trade, commercial or lower level managerial occupations, 18 per cent in professional occupations and 19 per cent were retired;
- 27 per cent had less than a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, 17 per cent had completed Year 12 or equivalent, 12 per cent held a technical qualification, 18 per cent had completed some university education and 24 per cent had completed a university degree;
- 43 per cent had never been married, 35 per cent were currently married, 12 per cent divorced or separated and 10 per cent widowed;
- 80 per cent were born in Australia and 91 per cent spoke English as their first language.

Research assistants (all local residents) used their knowledge of the community to recruit participants.

The Transport and Media studies were conducted in three areas (city — Sydney; tourist destination — the Blue Mountains; and rural region — Bathurst) and with three generations — teenagers, parents of teenagers and older people. The Transport study involved three focus groups, corresponding to generational group, of six to ten people in both Sydney and the Blue Mountains — at each ‘end’ of an important inter-urban train line — and four long interviews were undertaken in each age group. The Media study involved three similar focus groups in Sydney, the Blue Mountains and Bathurst, with fourteen people in the Blue Mountains ‘older people’ group. This study included six long interviews in each age group.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Main study**

The Main study examined fear of crime as a ‘way of seeing’ in which personal attributes interact with age, gender and physical location to produce knowledge. The following findings arose from the interviews and focus groups:

- I** Personal experience was strongly linked to heightened awareness of the risk of crime. A sense of physical vulnerability was also clearly structured according to gender and age: older people may feel physically vulnerable, but the fact that younger people are more active in places and at times when crime may occur makes younger people more afraid of crime.
- I** Parents of teenagers are more afraid for their children than they are for themselves and struggle between a desire to protect their children and the belief that their children should enjoy increasing autonomy.
- I** Many people fear an ‘unpredictable stranger’, and they are more afraid of encountering this figure in public spaces. People see crime as being potentially all around them at different times in different places. They construct mental maps of public places — the dark alley, the park at night, the river or beach area, the housing estate, the open-air shopping mall after hours — according to whether they are well-lit, highly or sparsely used at night, or populated by dangerous ‘others’.

Wollongong: *[I feel safe walking alone in my neighbourhood because...] there's always a lot of people around. You'll very rarely be walking down the street by yourself. You always see somebody else, it's usually somebody else going to buy the paper or go for a walk.*

Hobart: *[I feel unsafe walking alone in my neighbourhood because...] I think because it's isolated and I feel I'm putting myself in a vulnerable position...if you're on your own, then you could be a target for strange people or whatever. I definitely run across people [in bushland reserves near the suburb where she lives] who make me feel uncomfortable.*

*[I feel] safer walking around Sydney or Melbourne at night...because there are more people on the streets in the larger cities.*

- Some areas become symbolic locations of danger, whereas sites of highly publicised mass killings (for example, Port Arthur, Strathfield) are not identified as dangerous because the crimes that made them infamous are seen as random events, unlikely to be repeated.
- While the home is seen as a place of greater safety and control<sup>2</sup>, women are more concerned than men about securing it against invasion and they are also more fearful of public spaces because it is there that they experience regular and disquieting sexual harassment.
- All respondents (including young people) see young people in particular as a source of threat in public spaces; young women fear sexual assault and young men see themselves as potential targets of 'homies' and gangs.
- Respondents feel Australian society is becoming less civil as people lose interest in others and 'community spirit' disappears: institutions such as the police, judiciary and social welfare are seen as failing, while young people's alienation, unemployment and drug-taking increase fear of them as 'unpredictable strangers'.

In order to explore the relationship between perception of risk and fear of crime participants were first asked to state how much at risk they felt from mugging, sexual assault, home burglary, physical assault and car theft, and then asked to rate how much they worried about experiencing those incidents.

<sup>2</sup> These findings should be interpreted in the context of this research study which investigated fear of crime in public places only, and did not address issues surrounding fear in the home, such as domestic violence or abuse.

**TABLE 1**  
**RATINGS OF PERCEIVED RISK AND WORRY ABOUT SIX CRIMES**

	HIGH RISK %	VERY WORRIED %	MODERATE RISK %	MODERATE WORRY %	LOW RISK %	SLIGHTLY WORRIED %	NO RISK %	NOT WORRIED %
Mugging	6	4	29	11	58	47	7	38
Sexual assault	7	7	20	12	51	30	22	52
Home burglary	19	9	49	30	30	41	2	21
Murder	3	5	5	5	62	25	30	66
Physical assault	9	7	32	19	50	43	9	31
Car theft	14	7	44	21	26	31	16	41

As shown in Table 1, participants felt more at risk from home burglary, car theft and physical assault than from the other crimes. Participants were also more likely to be worried about these crimes, although there was a marked difference between their risk rating and their worry. For example, 68 per cent considered themselves to be at a high or moderate risk of home burglary, but only 39 per cent were very or moderately worried about being burgled.

The mass media provide information about, yet increase fear of, crime. However, many respondents feel that the media do not reliably present facts about crime. Media and personal experience work together to generate fear of crime, and people respond to a specific report of an incident to project more diffuse anxieties — often an amalgam of fatalism (crime is random and unpredictable) and victim-blaming (crime is the result of the ‘wrong attitude’).

When the research participants were asked a general question about possible strategies to reduce fear of crime, their responses fell into five categories:

- socio-economic solutions (addressing poverty and unemployment);
- law and order solutions (harsher penalties, legalising heroin, gun laws);
- surveillance solutions (greater police presence in public spaces, closed-circuit television in trains and shopping malls);
- community solutions (more community spirit); and

- activity solutions (more leisure activities and facilities for young and unemployed people).

While these strategies aim either to make the ‘other’ more like us or to keep them at arm’s length, both approaches are directed at bringing order to the ‘unpredictable stranger’.

At the same time a range of personal crime prevention strategies also try to domesticate the unpredictable: staying alert to one’s environment, avoiding contact, grouping, securing the home, and maintaining a positive attitude that refuses the ‘victim’ role.

- Older people may feel more vulnerable but they tend not to place themselves in risky situations.
- Younger people have less choice about moving in public spaces — where they are confronted by ‘homies’ and other threatening people — to reach leisure facilities, or attend school.
- Women see themselves at higher risk of crimes against the person, feel less safe walking alone at night and do so less frequently. Underlying women’s fear of attack is their perception that they are at greater risk of sexual assault: no gender differences were found in perceived risk of non-sexual assault.
- Age is an important indicator of perceived risk and worry about crime; middle-aged people perceive themselves as most at risk of property crime and worry most about it, while young people see themselves as at greater risk of crimes against the person and have a higher level of worry. Older people walk alone at night only if they feel safe, while young people often go out alone even if they do not feel safe.

## Transport study

In the Transport study, interviews with three generational groups revealed that teenagers have the greatest fear of crime on public transport, while parents have significant fears for their children travelling at night, particularly at bus stops and stations as well as on trains. Older people by and large avoid travelling on public transport at night, often giving plausible explanations. However, a minority want to 'reclaim public space' from 'undesirables' and others argue that they would use public transport at night if it were safer.

There are distinct patterns of response according to age and gender:

- female teenagers particularly fear sexual and physical assault. All ages of men are suspect because teenage girls are subject to continuous sexual harassment (especially on trains) ranging from looks, through accidental touching to actual assault — a spectrum that is often unrecognised by authorities as a serious and significant source of fear of crime. Teenage girls adopt a range of surveillance and avoidance strategies to cope with their fear on trains, but by and large do not feel disempowered. Some travel in groups at night; others continue to travel alone and say they only worry when faced with specific situations

*I read because a lot of peoples stare. I don't know whether it's meant to be intimidating but it gets on my nerves. Although she reads, she also carefully monitors carriage activity through watching reflections in the window;*

- male teenagers have a specific visual, behavioural and cultural 'anthropology' of subcultures of risk for which they devise specific fear management or avoidance strategies. Above all 'homies' are feared by teenage boys, because these groups target trains and stations, and students wearing particular school uniforms. Very high levels of fear were encountered among male teenagers in relation to this group

*You don't go out of your way to dodge people, you just keep your head down...Homies, some will tend to look for people to rob and assault, some will just have fun beating someone up, they just enjoy it...On the trains it can be a matter of luck whether they get on your carriage or whether you get on a bad carriage...;*

- parents fear transport crime since teenagers travel at night a lot for their leisure activities, and where parents can afford to do so they adopt a compromise between surveillance and autonomy by providing mobile phones, Cabcharge and so on, or by collecting them from train stations or bus stops. Parents have little direct contact with the subcultures that may threaten their children, and they have a much less precise knowledge of them than teenagers do; and
- the older participants in this study generally did not travel on public transport at night — especially trains — and few have experience of frightening situations on trains. They are more concerned about direct physical risks such as too-high bus steps, being knocked over or tripping. However, older people themselves make very clear distinctions between the frail and the not-so-frail, and it is a very important matter of identity for many to be able to travel independently. This group includes some of the strongest advocates of ‘reclaiming public space’.

One older lady said she always carries an apple, a fruit knife and a steel crochet hook if she travels on her own on the train. In one incident three 16–18 year-olds tormented an old man near her by flicking him with a rolled-up newspaper. Then they got bored and turned to her, flicking her three times before she reacted. She got up and stood over them

*Three times I got it. I got my knife out and I said, ‘One more thing from you and I’ll put this through you, because I carry a black belt.’ And they got up and went. I thought I’ve gotta win it. And the old fella said, ‘Have you got a black belt?’ and I said, ‘Yes, in the wardrobe’.*

As well as the gutsy humour of the story, there is also a precise legal logic: the apple is carried to justify her knife, otherwise she could be arrested for carrying an offensive weapon. Carrying a knife or any other weapon is illegal and dangerous, even if it is for protection, and is not advised.

All generational groups feel train travel is less safe than bus travel; all argue for more uniformed security personnel on trains and the re-staffing of stations at night; and almost all construct ‘landscapes of fear’. Travelling by train was isolated as being one of the most fear-inducing activities in public space — a fear echoed and even surpassed by railway staff, with many guards afraid to move through trains at night. Inadequate communication between train personnel and police and the invisibility of staff leaves passengers isolated and potential targets for groups that focus on the railway system. While railway staff tend to blame fear of crime on the media, they are often fearful for their own family members travelling by train.

The Transport study also provides an example of the risks, avoidance behaviours and strategies that could be adopted in ‘reclaiming public space’, since many of the same problems — for example, with ‘homies’ — pertain to other public spaces such as shopping malls at night.

### **Media study**

While the various media informed people about crime, many respondents were cynical about the accuracy and sensationalism of crime reporting, recognising media ‘beat-ups’ and over-reporting of certain types of crime in certain areas. However, this type of reporting did increase people’s fears about some areas of Sydney which have become inextricably associated with crime and danger.

Teenagers can be scared of ‘reality’ media crime genres and often relate that their fears are exacerbated by them. The news and television programs such as Australia’s Most Wanted tell young people that violent crime is rampant, that there is a high probability they could be victims and that the police are at best poor and at worst corrupt in solving or preventing violent crime. Young people, however, realise that the media are not portraying the situation accurately and want more realistic information about the probability that they could become victims.

Blue Mountains teenagers believe the media deliberately under-report crime in the area so that tourists continue to visit, while Redfern teenagers believe the media sensationalise crime in their area and under-report good news. Gossip and other experiences then become the basis for estimating risk of victimisation. Cleveland Street/Redfern young people comment that there is no mention of Aboriginal community spirit and solidarity even in local papers (railways management also comment that local papers have not reported improved lighting and upgrades of a high-crime station).

*The Western Suburbs [are only shown] in a sensationalist way. You know 'crime in the Western Suburbs!' But I haven't had any trouble at all...Every now and again it will come up in the media as 'an issue', especially if it has to do with other cultures; Asian gangs, drug-dealing at Cabramatta.*

In contrast, fictional police series are enjoyed where they are 'realistic' (potentially 'about' the local community, even if set in London) and with good acting and narrative 'twists'. Shows like *NYPD Blue* suggest that the bad guys are always caught, and this is seen as being unrealistic. Teenagers say police fiction where the 'good guys' win provides only brief comfort, but is boring.

No media form — fiction or fact, national or local — provides satisfactory information or comfort from fear of crime. One Sydney teenager who had been a victim or near-victim of mugging, home break-ins and sexual abuse (as well as having a drug addict in the family) articulated this clearly. For her, news was 'scary' on probabilistic grounds but did not deal with the more sensitive side of sexual or drug abuse as she had experienced it. Police fiction might deal with these issues, but the shows themselves were 'unbelievable'.

There was also a strong sense by young people that the media portrayal of police was biased, showing them as positive keepers of the peace and friendly, whereas much of their own experience of police was negative and included harassment and sexist or racist behaviour from police.

Parents of teenagers are extremely concerned about the type of society in which their children are growing up, because of what is seen in the media, and their children's responses to it. They worry that increased exposure to violence through television and movies has made the younger generation in general more callous and less sympathetic or caring. They also worry about young people's perceptions of violence and death, as being lighter and more trivial than those of previous generations. Many parents said they were actively involved in monitoring their children's media use, watching television and movies with them in order to impart their own values to their children or at least serve as a reality check.

Parents of teenagers shared their views that the media is politically biased in its reporting of certain crimes in certain areas, particularly the perceived under-reporting of crime in the Blue Mountains and constant negative reporting about the Western suburbs. They shared the teenagers' desire for more realistic and accurate information

*Information lowers a feeling of fear in any area for me...I can't fully assess [something] and make a personal judgment about what level of worry I should have about it...Sometimes a lack of information can be worse than sensationalism because it leaves you with questions that can play on your mind...I would rather make a judgment for myself.*

Some parents were worried about violent computer games and attempted to monitor their children's use of them. They appeared to be less worried about internet technology instructing children how to commit crimes, make bombs etc. They said that such information has always been available and in any case their children use the internet for other informative and communicative purposes.

Parents are also concerned about media representations and mystification of other major social issues such as violence, drugs, racism and police corruption. Some discussed the angles used by the media in reporting certain types of crimes

*There's [a] huge amount of domestic violence out there that isn't shown. When a woman got...shot by her husband...outside the courthouse, that was dramatic enough to be covered by the media. But they don't cover every time a woman gets killed, especially not in domestic violence.*

*They only cover crimes against children when it's hot — topical — the news that does get into the media is very much the large, sensational stories, not the everyday ones, and then they can be isolated...as single events, like by one organisation — a Catholic orphanage or something.*

*Parents abusing children [isn't] covered enough.*

Parents' impressions of police representation in the media are that corruption and cynical portrayals have become more common in recent years. There was some criticism of police among parents, but considerably less than among the teenagers.

Parents, women and older people prefer *The Bill* and other British shows to American police series. For parents this was because of their 'relevance', 'realism', and the portrayal of organisations in a meaner, more corrupt world. For women of all ages it is seen as an 'entertaining' middle ground between violent or more probing police shows. It is 'contextual, localised and individualised'. For older people, British series such as *Heartbeat* and *The Bill* either reinforced their memories of a safer era, or showed an equivalent world of decent face-to-face relations where police 'do it right'.

Older people in general agreed that there was much more violence on television and in society than they would like to see, that they preferred police shows where the good guys win, and that they were alarmed, and felt threatened by, the reporting of home invasions. They usually switched off television shows which contained violence. Their responses to the perceived threat of crime and violence seemed to vary according to whether the older person lived alone or with others. Those who lived alone were generally more fearful and isolated themselves against the world outside, whereas others took precautions but still took part in society and enjoyed getting out of the house. Almost all were conscious about security.

In general, older people worry a great deal about how violence in the media might be affecting young people. They are concerned that American cop shows and the internet teach children how to commit crime and make bombs, and that computer games are desensitising them to violence. They worry about children and teenagers being left at home alone with television as a babysitter. Older people also feel more fearful of the unpredictability of crime as it is portrayed in the media and are more cynical about the police, in whom they once had more faith. Older people also felt that media reporting was biased and that it only represents 'one side of the story'.

## FIELDWORK RESEARCH: CONCLUSIONS

Until now there has been insufficient use of qualitative methodologies to address fear of crime issues. This fieldwork research has successfully used a qualitative approach to investigate fear of crime among a relatively small number of people from a range of age-groups, backgrounds and locations, revealing detailed information about how people conceptualise and contextualise their fears.

The findings from this fieldwork research confirm and extend the findings from the literature review, that a primary focus of people's fear is the 'unpredictable stranger' in the uncontrollable environment. A principal factor underlying this fear is uncertainty, about how a stranger may behave. To some, the 'unpredictable stranger' is 'known' to some degree, for example to women he is any unknown male and the fear is mainly of sexual assault, while to young men he is a young male and belongs to a specific 'other' subculture.

As in the literature review, the fieldwork findings identify age, gender, social group, time and place as significant factors related to fear of crime. Together with personal histories, experiences of victimisation, harassment or incivilities and information from the community and the media, individuals form unique opinions about their risk of becoming a victim, and respond emotionally to that perceived risk through fear and outrage to varying degrees. They also respond practically with a variety of strategies developed to deal with their fear or to reduce their risk, such as surveillance of the environment, monitoring the movements of 'others', avoiding eye contact, going out in a group, having a positive attitude and not assuming the 'victim' role. In general, participants reported fairly low levels of perceived risk, and even lower levels of worry.

The most significant new findings from this fieldwork research are those which challenge commonly held perceptions about who is afraid of crime and to what degree

■ older people in this study were not as afraid of crime as previous research and common perceptions have suggested. Their fears focussed more on physical frailty and property crime than about physical or sexual assault. They chose not to venture out at night or to certain places for a variety of reasons, not necessarily fear of crime;

- fear of crime among women in the study was heightened by fear of sexual assault, a rational fear because of their everyday experiences of harassment and incivilities, primarily from men;
- younger people in the study had higher levels of fear than was expected from the literature or common perceptions. The source of the fear was other young people, particularly those from certain other youth subcultures. Their assessment of risk was accurate but this did not stop them from going out at night, using public transport;
- all groups in the study felt fearful at some time on public transport for a range of reasons; and
- the media are only one information source about crime or risk of victimisation, and are therefore only one influence on fear. Study participants selectively filtered information from the media choosing to believe only what they wanted or thought was credible. Participants gained information on crime from many sources, for example gossip, victims or friends of victims.

## EXISTING FEAR REDUCTION PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES

### METHODOLOGY

The researchers collected information on a range of strategies and programs both in Australia and overseas. Over a hundred were reviewed for their ‘fear of crime’ content, whether an evaluation had taken place and any indicators for success. Thirty four were detailed in the full report representing the best of those examined. Personnel involved in implementing a variety of programs and strategies were interviewed as part of this study. The review was by no means exhaustive but designed to provide a useful snapshot (Appendix 1 of Volume 1 in the full report provides details of each program reviewed).

### FINDINGS

In most cases, the reduction of fear of crime was an afterthought or an assumed objective within a more generalised program to reduce crime itself. There was often a presumption that if crime is reduced, fear of crime will naturally decline also. The research shows this not to be the case.

Many of the programs in the UK which have dealt explicitly with fear of crime revolve around situational crime prevention measures such as street lighting and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). An exception has been work undertaken in Manchester where social and economic imperatives have prompted the ‘24 Hour City’ conference where crime *and* fear were specifically addressed. All key stakeholders were involved in this initiative.

The report looks in some detail at the dual components of the NSW State Rail strategy addressing both victimisation and perceptions of safety. Staff and passenger needs were highlighted. The strategy due to be completed by 2000 includes traditional situational CPTED measures such as Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), help points, and increased staffing and security levels at stations and on trains. This was a developing strategy showing some early signs of success. Although some of the research shows CCTV to be ineffective in reducing crime its presence makes people feel safer. Increasing staff numbers is preferable.

Few of the programs reviewed had an evaluation component making it impossible to assess whether crime, let alone fear of crime was reduced and other objectives met. Some of the more promising programs involve consultation with target groups, involvement of key stakeholders and a range of strategies to specifically address fear. For example:

- *Glenorchy City Council Street Youth Work project* (Tas) dealt with problems involving young people using public space around a shopping centre and bus interchange, by engaging the young people in other activities, providing services to address their problems and needs, and improving relationships between the young people and police and retailers;
- *Not just buses and trains* (NSW) undertaken by Blacktown Youth Services Association to reduce the level of community concern about juvenile crime and address the causes of crime committed by young people, focussed mainly on train stations and bus interchanges, and involved the police and rail staff;
- *Safe women Liverpool project* (NSW) used a phone-in to find out about women's safety concerns in the Liverpool area, in response to high levels of fear of crime. A number of areas of concern were identified, particularly associated with Liverpool Railway Station, and as a result changes were initiated to address the problems; and
- *CLASP Project* (ACT) was set up by the Council on the Ageing (COTA) in response to a survey among elderly people which identified a need for safety and security advice. A member of the ambulance, fire and police services visits the home and completes a security/safety audit, providing appropriate advice to the resident.

## PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES: CONCLUSIONS

The review of programs and strategies, although not exhaustive, yielded disappointing results. Very few programs explicitly addressed fear of crime and evaluation of outcomes was virtually non-existent. Where a proper analysis of fear took place with relevant target groups and a range of solutions implemented, signs of success could be detected.

C O N C L U S I O N S : A N S W E R S  
T O R E S E A R C H Q U E S T I O N S

*These conclusions address the eight research questions posed at the beginning of the study, and result from the combined phases of the project. Fieldwork was conducted with specific groups and in certain localities; not a representative sample of the population.*

**1. Which groups in the community are afraid of crime, what are they afraid of, and from whom?**

- The ‘unpredictable stranger’ was the focus for most respondent’s fears, especially in public places, and especially at night. This person is generally male and is someone who is ‘different’ from the respondent, for example in terms of appearance, social group or culture. This fear is largely based on ‘uncertainty’ — because they did not know this person, they could not gauge how they would respond or act.
- Age and gender were the strongest predictors of fear.
- Young women and teenage girls were more afraid of sexual and physical assault and were particularly concerned about sexual harassment.
- Teenage boys in the study were particularly fearful about physical assault and robbery and could easily identify particular youth subcultures as threats.
- Public transport was identified as a source of fear for many people in the study, particularly teenage boys because of the ‘homie’ gangs who hang out there.
- Older people have a much more generalised fear that is more pervasive. They felt less at risk of crimes against the person than young people do because of their often restricted lifestyle and more limited use of public space (especially at night). They felt public transport at night was risky but chose not to travel for many reasons, not necessarily crime. They were more fearful of property crime and ‘home invasions’. They were however less fearful *of* young people than *for* them, and held other concerns about a general degradation and ‘breakdown’ in society.

- Parents are more fearful for their children than for themselves and are particularly worried about their children using public transport at night. They learn about the dangerous areas and ‘subcultures’ through their children who are well aware of the dangers they face.
- Teenagers are more likely to venture out at night despite their fears according to the fieldwork research, while older people have less desire or need to go out at night. Likewise young people often have no choice about travelling on public transport to get to school, work or entertainment. Their fear of crime is sporadic, generated by specific and situated instances or places and is managed by a variety of surveillance strategies.

## **2. Are all types of people equally afraid of crime?**

As noted above, not all types of people in the study were equally fearful of crime.

- The fieldwork showed clear subcultural groupings, each with specific different concerns, such as women and teenage girls concerned about sexual assault and harassment, and teenage boys concerned about ‘rival’ gangs.
- The research participants assumed that smaller, lighter people would be more at risk, from men, than stronger, bigger people. Many people, although cautious about protecting themselves, did not wish to position themselves as particularly fearful or as a victim.
- Substantial individual differences in fear of crime can result from different personal experiences, judgments, attitudes and values.
- Quantitative data from the fieldwork showed a slightly higher perceived risk of victimisation among people who had previously experienced violence or a crime against their person.
- In general, personal experience was strongly linked to increased awareness of risk and worry about becoming a victim, without always increasing fear.

### **3. In what contexts are people afraid of crime: eg are people more or less afraid of crime in the home or in public spaces?**

- In the literature review Gunter (1987) was noted to have found that perceived danger rose with increased distance from home.
- This research showed home as a safe place where people are in control of their own security, whereas public space is associated with the ‘unpredictable stranger’ in an uncontrollable environment.
- Some of the teenage girls in the study were worried about rape by strangers breaking into their homes at night, and some older people were concerned about ‘home invasions’.
- The research participants identified various settings as being particularly frightening or dangerous. These often specific locations included public transport (trains, buses, stations, interchanges), parks and open-air shopping malls after the shops close. Reasoning again surrounded the ‘unpredictable strangers’ who were often from ‘deviant’ or marginalised groups.

### **4. What is the relationship between being fearful in general and fear of crime?**

- Findings from this research supported the view that our societies have become more fearful in general in relation to the dangers and hazards of modern living. Most people’s generalised fears relate to their sense that society is breaking down and there is a lack of ‘community’. Fear of crime is contextualised within these broader concerns.
- Many people, particularly the women and older people in the study, viewed the world as a ‘meaner’ place now than it used to be, mainly due to media representations, but the researchers found it difficult to single out fear of crime from other anxieties about contemporary life.
- Fear of crime among most of the respondents was related more to personal experience and situations in time and place, than to personality or psychological traits. Fear of crime was intelligibly related to their real conditions of living.
- In relative terms fear of crime was only a minor source of anxiety to the respondents compared to life’s other daily challenges.

## 5. What is the relationship between being fearful and the likelihood of becoming a victim?

- The research found that the relationship between fear and the likelihood of becoming a victim is complex as people tend to use a variety of information sources to assess their personal level of risk.
- Individuals' notions about the likelihood of becoming a victim are constructed through repeated everyday experiences, including interactions with others, conversations with others about their experiences, and use of the mass media.
- 'Crime', as defined by chargeable/prosecutable offences such as those recorded in official crime statistics, is not the only focus of fear for many people. Shoving, bumping and pinching are also assaults and are commonplace in some situations, for example crowded trains or shopping malls. Together with other incivilities, they reinforce a person's general fear of crime. These lower level assaults are rarely reported or taken seriously by authorities.
- Women, for example, are socialised from childhood by their parents and society to be aware of potential dangers, especially from strangers and especially from men. This perceived threat is compounded by frequent unwanted attention from men such as staring, wolf-whistling or touching.
- Young people in the study were found to assess their level of risk quite accurately, acknowledging that they are at higher risk of crimes against the person.
- Young men knew that they were at greater risk of physical assault, and also knew who their potential attackers would be (other young men, from particular 'other' subcultures).
- Young women's greater perceived risk of personal crime related specifically to their higher perceived risk of sexual assault.
- Older people are traditionally reported to have a low rate of victimisation yet high levels of fear, but the position is not so straightforward. This research shows that they have relatively low levels of fear of crime against the person partly because they tend not to put themselves in 'risky' situations (in public places at night where fear is manifest), but greater fear of property crime and home invasion.

- Fear of crime is not necessarily related to having been a victim of crime, but can be related to a lifetime of incivilities.
- The study therefore supported the *rational* links that people make between their fear levels, likelihood of victimisation and actual life experiences. This was especially true of women and the young.

#### **6. What do we know about the range of concepts relevant to the fear of crime debate, in particular worry, outrage, risk evaluation and fear in general?**

- Worry about crime is predicted by perceived risk of victimisation.
- In general participants reported fairly low levels of perceived risk and even lower levels of worry.
- Levels of perceived risk and worry were gender-specific for particular crimes, such as sexual assault from which young women considered themselves to be at a greater risk and worried about more. Young men worried more about physical assault than women and perceived their risk to be higher.
- The research respondents viewed the impact of crimes against the person to be greater than the impact of property crimes, because of violation of sense of self.
- Outrage is an emotional response to crime, which tends to be directed in two ways among respondents: towards adults who sexually abused or violated children; and towards media ‘beat-ups’ of crime.
- The media are a focus of outrage for various age-groups, for different reasons. Younger people are often outraged at the media’s portrayal of the risks of drug use such as Ecstasy; while older people are outraged at the portrayal of violence in the media, including video games and the internet.
- Outrage is often political in nature or situated in the experiences of the individual, for example, young people in Redfern were outraged by police prejudice and young gays were outraged by persecution from other youth subcultures or police.
- Respondents from all groups were angry and frustrated by what they saw as a breakdown in the social welfare system and employment provision, and many were highly critical of the justice system and lack of drug law reform.

- There was a sense of outrage when official systems which are set up to protect people fail to do so. This can increase a general sense of risk and uncertainty.

## **7. What crime prevention methods need to be/have been used to prevent, reduce or manage fear of crime?**

- Transport authorities have undertaken a number of strategies to manage their passengers' fear of crime, including: encouraging passengers to sit in the 'blue light' carriage near the guard's compartment; reducing the numbers of train carriages at night thus encouraging 'safety in numbers'; 'safe' stations with cameras; better lighting; and the introduction of security guards on trains.
- Despite these measures the research participants rated fear on trains highly. They would like to see more staff, particularly uniformed police and security personnel at stations and on trains, especially at night.
- Other places associated with fear such as open-air shopping malls have established police points.
- A 'layered' approach to preventing crime such as that used in Bondi to deal with New Year's Eve celebrations can be successful in the appropriate context.
- The 'night-time economy' approach, increasing public use of space at night, can reduce fear of crime in that area, as occurred for example in Newtown, with longer opening hours and increased use of street cafes.
- The review of existing fear reduction programs and strategies revealed that in most cases, fear of crime reduction was an objective simply added on to crime prevention programs, assuming that if crime was reduced fear would also be reduced, but this is not necessarily the case.
- Furthermore individuals have developed a range of personal strategies to address their own fear.

## 8. What is known about the tools that measure fear of crime and the effectiveness of these tools in terms of reliability and whether they affect the fear of crime?

- The research found that questions such as *do you feel safe walking alone at night?*, used in quantitative surveys were hypothetical questions for many people (particularly the older age-group) who simply do not go out alone at night.
- Ferraro's (1995) quantitative instrument for measuring fear of crime was found to contain some useful items because it distinguishes between perceived risk and worry, and between a variety of personal and property crimes. The distinction between perceived risk and worry was seen to distinguish between risk assessment and fear.
- The qualitative approach taken by the researchers allowed them to probe the meaning of some questions, which would not be possible in a standard quantitative questionnaire.
- The research findings emphasise the value of using measurement tools which are situated in particular time and space coordinates and acknowledge the interactive relationships between people and crime.
- The research identified the following tools as most effective for measuring fear of crime: analysis of time and place coordinates; semi-structured, qualitative interviews; focus groups; short questionnaire in a long interview.
- The most effective measures for managing fear of crime were identified as: community empowerment and solidarity; institutional analysis; community analysis; and risk perception analysis in relation to the risk of becoming a victim of crime.

## W H E R E T O F R O M H E R E ?

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Significant implications for directing and improving policy and practice have arisen out of this research. They have largely been developed by NCAVAC but can undoubtedly be built upon by others.

These implications break down roughly into two parts: those which relate to ‘measuring and analysing fear of crime’ and those which relate to ‘designing and implementing fear reduction programs’. These implications are outlined in full at the end of the Executive Summary (p 12–15).

### FEAR OF CRIME — STAGE 2

Stage 2 will involve the development, implementation and evaluation of pilot projects addressing fear of crime issues to take place in Tasmania, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

Through its communications strategy NCAVAC plans to disseminate these research findings and recommendations as widely as possible to policy makers, academics, local governments, practitioners in the field of crime prevention, urban planners, and other relevant professionals. This will increase knowledge and awareness about fear of crime and improve policy making and practice.

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## A P P E N D I X

The following steps to reduce fear of crime were developed by the researchers from Charles Sturt University and are contained within the full report.

### **NINE STEPS FOR REDUCING FEAR OF CRIME**

#### **1. Consult with the target community**

Preferably by calling for submissions from interested parties (particularly marginalised groups) and convening public meetings and focus groups to:

- identify key stakeholders;
- establish the level of fear and whether high levels of fear are generally restricted to a particular group;
- establish the foci of the fears held by community members (property crime, crimes against the person, incivility, social decline, subcultures); and
- establish whether the fear is related to particular places and times.

#### **2. Form a stakeholders' working party**

The working party should include as a minimum, representatives from the police, local government, the target community/group and other affected parties such as ambulance or fire services, health or public transport authorities.

#### **3. Establish a strategy to deal with the immediate, visible source of the fear**

This will develop confidence that the concerns of community members are being addressed — for example, by deploying police or security personnel to the source of the fear.

#### **4. Carry out research to identify social or environmental factors that could underlie identified causes of fear**

This could involve:

- investigating the information already gathered from the target community/group;
- employing social workers to liaise with groups that contribute to fear, such as young people; and/or

- liaising with police about the problems identified — for example, drug crime leading to increases in property crime and to drug-related offences.

### **5. Establish the objectives of the program**

These should be directly related to the needs of the target community/group, as derived from data collected during previous steps. Evaluation processes should be built into the program from the beginning.

### **6. Select the most appropriate components for the program**

These will depend on the needs of the target community/group, budget and the skills base and resources of the stakeholders.

### **7. Implement the program for a six-month trial period**

The program should draw on a multi-agency approach. Each component will share objectives and will be implemented in concert. For example, in a strategy to reduce attacks at a shopping centre car park the Chamber of Commerce might employ a security officer, police might increase patrols and the local council might employ a youth worker to deal with the needs of young people who are perceived to be the cause of the problem.

### **8. After the trial, evaluate the program**

This may involve community consultation through convening similar focus groups, comparing statistical data or collating media reports, letters and other evidence of the program/strategy's impact. Any component that purports to reduce or prevent fear of crime should not be evaluated as successful unless data to support the assertion are available for scrutiny.

### **9. Continue the program or return to step 6**

If the program is successful, a maintenance program should be continued. If not, after reappraising the data the process should begin again at stage 6 (in some cases the cycle might need to be repeated from step 1).