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"AIC's research on firearms theft: talking points"

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AIC's Research on Firearms Theft

Talking Points

Firearms Theft: What Does Administrative Data Tell Us

- A total of 25,171 firearms were reported stolen to police in Australian between 1994/95 and 1999/00. This equates to an average of about 4,000 firearms stolen per year, or an average of about 12 per day.
- Unless reported to the police, these figures do not include those firearms stolen from Defence armouries. Despite requests for the data, the AIC was unable to obtain such figures.
- Since 1996/97, the number of firearms reported stolen to police appears to have decreased. It is important to note that the figure for 1999/2000 includes the 600 odd handguns and parts that were reported stolen from one dealer in SA.
- Considering a total stock of approximately three million firearms post 1997, with only about one firearm in a thousand is reported stolen in the course of a year – firearms theft is a rare event.
- In terms of the type of firearms reported stolen to police, the study found that rifles (52%) accounted for just over half. Followed by shotguns (22%) and handguns (14%). Other firearms accounted for 10 percent and air-rifles accounted for 5 per cent.
- In contrast, handguns appear to be the most common type of firearm used in crime. For example, of all murders committed with a firearm in New South Wales in 2001, handguns accounted for 57%, in firearm robberies, handguns accounted for 62% and in assaults with a firearm, handguns accounted for 55%.

- The majority of firearms stolen in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory between 1 July 1994 and 30 June 2000 were stolen from a residential location, usually a dwelling (80.7%). This does not include South Australia and the ACT.
- A further 13 per cent of firearms were stolen from some ‘other location’ such as retail establishment, agricultural, recreational, manufacturing, banking, etc. Only 7 per cent of firearms were stolen from a location classified as ‘community’. This includes educational, health, transport, justice, open space, street/footpath, and religious location.

What Can’t Administrative Data Tell Us?

- Are all firearms that are reported stolen to police *actually* stolen or are they reported stolen but actually sold on the black market?
- Firearms theft has been identified as a potential source of firearms for the black market, but what percentage of firearms are actually transferred into the illegitimate firearms market?
- What percentage of firearms are later recovered by police?
- What percentage of stolen firearms are subsequently used in crime?
- What percentage of stolen firearms are not reported to police?
- Can the stockpile of firearms on the black market be quantified?
- What are the sources of firearms used in crime? What make, model and calibre of firearm are usually stolen?

Why Don’t We Know? Limitations of Administrative data:

- Not all jurisdictions routinely collect the same information. For example, all jurisdictions except for the South Australia and the ACT provided data on the “type of firearm” (handgun, rifle, etc) stolen whereas South Australia provided details on the “category of firearm” (Category A, B, etc) stolen. South Australia could not provide details as to the location of the firearms

theft, rather they provided data on the “type of owner” (individual, organisation, dealer).

- Administrative data are limited by:
 - Definitions of what constitutes a crime
 - Variability in reporting by citizens
 - Law enforcement organisational structures
 - Variations in counting rules across jurisdictions
 - Low rates of detection and clearance (Makkai 2002).

- Limitations associated with administrative data can be overcome by value-adding research: For example, the National Homicide Monitoring Program uses police offence reports as one of its main data sources, but has produced numerous research reports examining the various facets of homicide in Australia. The National Armed Robbery Monitoring Program which is in the final stages of establishment undertook an exploratory analysis of armed robbery that occurred during the last quarter of 2001;

How Do We Find Out What We Don't Know?

- Focussed studies and research data allow for a more in-depth exploration of an issue. For example, the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) Program ran two Weapons Addendums (third quarter 2001 and fourth quarter 2002). The addendum surveys sought to determine the extent to which police detainees self-reported: owning weapons, using weapons to commit a crime; reasons for owning; supply source; links to criminal history and drug links.

- Such empirical data can be used to quantify the size of the problem; inform the following: policing strategies for stemming supply; street-level policing

in terms of how they are to be encountering people who have a weapon; and police training.

- The AIC has developed the ACT Firearms Audit Survey on behalf of ACT Policing and the ACT Department of Justice and Community Safety, which will be administered to firearms licencees who are audited between February and March 2003 in the ACT. This survey seeks to obtain information on the following:
 - The level of compliance and non-compliance with firearms storage requirements;
 - Whether firearms were secured or unsecured at the time of the theft;
 - If firearms secured correctly, how did the offender gain access to the firearms?
 - How did the Police respond to the reporting of the theft of a firearm?
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- This information will be used to better inform policy with regards to the increase in the number of firearms reported stolen from residential premises in the ACT.