After Port Arthur we did a report for the Minister for Health on Indicators of Aggression - when I presented it to him in his office in Parliament House he said “if we were to lock up everybody who exhibited aggressive risk factors, we’d have to lock up 5% of the population” he then raised his eyes, and said, “and 10% of the people in here!!”

One policy question I’d like to explore today is what do we do when we see early warning signals - the Port Arthur gunman was deemed odd by all - the kid who shot his parents and schoolmates last week in Springfield Oregon had boasted that he’d kill people - and on and on.

We hear similar stories about domestic violence. How do we prevent? How and when should we intervene? Who should intervene? Who has the responsibility what is private behaviour? When does it become a public matter?

How many types of violence can you identify???

list

The key aims in developing a strategy against crime and disorder in any community focus on

- reducing the community’s vulnerability to crime and violence
- diverting potential offenders into more constructive activities

The two key features are

- The involvement of community members and workers in projects, strategies, networks, and committees to prevent violence and crime; and
- the creation and expansion of opportunities for all people to live, work, socialise, and play without feeling threatened or harassed.

We cannot understand crime and violence without understanding the community we live in, and the dynamics and changes which lubricate and confront it. We cannot underestimate the changes in the economy, in technology, in family relations, and in particular the changes experienced by young people trying to sort out where they fit into a society in which the goal posts keep changing all the time.

We often hear laments for the “good old days”, when there was no crime. These “good old days” have been embellished somewhat, and we simply cannot step
back in time to an earlier era in which the patterns of work, housing, technology, family structure, domestic arrangements, financial dependency and sexual activity were as they were 100 years ago, or even 40 years ago.

Changes in our social and economic structure have left many people without traditional roles with which they feel comfortable, and valued. The mismatch between young people’s natural abilities and tasks and roles available for them undermines social control and cohesion. As adolescents develop and grow they have increased stamina and activity levels, an interest in sex, and the development of reproductive capacities. They are full of energy, have trouble sitting still, need something to do; they have a lot of sexual energy and are physically prepared for two traditional and serious human tasks, doing work and raising a family.

Not very long ago teenagers would use their physical stamina and strength in their everyday work lives (because there were jobs) and home lives (because they lived with their parents). They left school, got jobs, married and had children in very quick succession - often well before a young person today would be halfway through a university degree.

The society in which we live is a society that has come to value instant gratification, and our technology delivers this. We don’t put an enormous amount of energy into feeding ourselves - from chopping wood for the stove through to preserving and drying. We eat when we want to. We don’t wait for our favourite movies - we watch them on video when we want them; we don’t bank during banking hours, we bank when we want to; we pay our bills by phone in the middle of the night if we want to; we use electronic mail so we can get instant replies, not wait for the postman; we don’t wait until we get home to make our phone calls, we make them instantly on the mobile etc.

Put this against a backdrop of violence and aggression in our entertainment and news media, in participant and spectator sport, and fierce competitiveness in many work practices, it is a wonder that there is not more widespread violence.

What this emphasises is that we are enormously adaptable. The overwhelming majority of our population does not behave badly; the overwhelming majority of young people whose education does not get them a satisfactory job do not behave violently; the overwhelming majority of middle aged people whose skills have been undermined, or rendered obsolete by technological change, or who have been made redundant do not behave violently; the overwhelming majority of family heads who receive insufficient support to maintain their families do not behave violently etc. But some do, and cause enormous stress to the community, and keep the criminal justice system in business.

Australia is one of the safest countries in the world. Australians can go about their daily lives with little chance of their becoming the target of a criminal
attack. But it does happen - and the prospect that it might happen worries a lot of people. And although most of Australia is comparatively safe, the incidence of crime is much greater than it was 20 years ago. Criminal activity hurts and outrages people, and costs the community billions of dollars.

**slides**

1. Random violence - is expressed by persons unable to form a clear intent - drug abuse or mental illness for example - and such behaviour is usually unreasoned, and the consequences sometimes devastating such as spree killings in Port Arthur, Hoddle Street for example.
2. Instrumental - violence such as intimidation employed to achieve a desired end.
3. Expressive - the product of extreme irritation, such as dissatisfaction with poor service, or desperation from welfare applicants with resources.
4. Unmet Needs - unmet physical needs, unmet emotional and self-identity needs, displaced anger from past situations and feelings and expectations towards the organisation concerned rather than the issue in hand.
5. Criminal - is manifested in pursuit of criminal aims.

We know that observations worldwide indicate the following as the main causes of crime:

- under-achievement in education;
- economic downturn;
- lack of employment opportunities;
- boredom;
- drug experimentation;
- exploitation by association with drugs;
- fear inducing activities;
- racism; and
- alcoholism

We Know that the National Committee on Violence examined the issues very carefully, and concluded:

- Australia is a less violent place than it was during the period from its establishment as a penal colony until Federation. However, it is more violent than it was before the Second World War.
- The rate of homicide in Australia is relatively low by international standards, and has shown no significant change over the past twenty years.
• The rates of various types of non-fatal violence, that is assault, sexual assault, and robbery, have increased sharply since the early 1970s.
• The rate of non-fatal assault appears high by the standards of western industrial societies.
• Rates of violent crime are not evenly distributed across Australia. For example, they tend to be higher in large cities than in country areas. They are also uneven across jurisdictions: the level of violence in the Northern Territory is substantially higher than elsewhere, while the rate of violent offending appears to be actually declining in Tasmania.
• Violent offenders in Australia are overwhelmingly male, primarily between the ages of 18 and 30, and predominantly from blue-collar backgrounds.
• Despite perceptions to the contrary, violent offending by juveniles is relatively uncommon. Gang violence is not a major problem in most jurisdictions.
• Most homicides and assaults are committed by persons known to the victim. Random attacks by strangers, although deeply disturbing when they do occur, are relatively rare.
• Infants up to one year old are the age group at greatest risk of homicide. The overwhelming majority of child victims are killed by their parents or other relatives.
• Victims of violence most commonly tend to fall into two broad categories: men who become engaged in altercations with other men; and women and children who suffer at the hands of men with whom they have been living.
• Men, especially those who are young, single and unemployed, are at far greater risk of becoming victims of all forms of violence than are women, except for the categories of sexual assault and domestic violence.

We know that the prevention of violence cannot to be achieved by law enforcement alone, but rather through inter-sectoral collaboration, and in particular through a range of health promotion, education, and community service activities.

Victims

We know that crime is not an equal opportunity predator. The chance of becoming a victim depends on where you live, how you live, who you are and who you know.

We know that victims of violent crime often know their attacker. This is most likely the case in homicide, where two thirds of victims are killed by a family member or an acquaintance; most assault victims know their attacker, around one half of robbery victims, and less than half of sexual assault victims know their attacker. (Most sexual assaults are not reported to police)
We know that many people are victimised in their homes, and that one’s home is not the safe haven that we would wish it to be. While the overwhelming majority of robberies occur outside the home, the majority of sexual assaults occur inside the home, as do the majority of homicides. So too, do a variety of violent crimes that are loosely described as child abuse, elder abuse, and domestic violence

**Homicide**

A few months ago, I was giving a lecture to a group of undergraduates and asked them “how many homicides a year do you think we have in Australia?” I then wrote four numbers on the board and said that one of these was correct - 300; 3000; 30,000; 300,000. I asked for a show of hands for each choice, and none opted for 300 or 300,000 - most went for 3,000 with a couple opting for 30,000.

The figure is in the order of 300 per year in Australia.

At the Australian Institute of Criminology, we monitor all homicides in Australia and over the past 7 years, there were 2226 homicide incidents) involving 2415 victims and 2653 perpetrators).

An analysis of Australian homicides over the past seven years reveals an amazing consistency of patterns. On average there have been 318 incidents per year, and seven of ten of these cases are the result of an episode between people who are known to each other: friends, acquaintances, intimate partners or other family members.

The popular perception of homicide is that of an act committed by a cold, calculating killer or stranger, as we so often see in the movies. But homicide is usually the unintended outcome of an quarrel between lovers or friends which escalates out of control, or a purposive attempt to end a relationship - once and for all. Offenders are most likely people who are unable to control emotions of anger, frustration or jealousy.

35% of homicides involve family members, 38% involve friends and acquaintances, and 16% involve strangers. It is this stranger category that worries most people, though the streets are much safer than the home.

Residential locations account for over 60% of homicides, and 20% take place in open areas - such as on the streets, in parks, in the bush etc.

The typical **offender** is likely to be male - 90% of offenders are men, and more likely to be in their teens and twenties, never married and not working. The remaining 10% of offenders who are women, have an even spread of ages, and are more likely to be in a relationship, or have been in one.

The typical **victim** is harder to portray. 60% of victims are male, and 40% are female. The typical male victim is likely to be aged between 18 and 35, never married, not working, and killed by a male friend or acquaintance, from the same
racial or ethnic group. The typical female victim is likely to be between 18 and 26, married or in a relationship, not working, and killed by an intimate partner.

Very different patterns prevail when men kill men, compared to when men kill women. About one in three homicide incidents involve a man killing a woman. When **men kill men** it is often, as Professor Ken Polk a criminologist from the University of Melbourne has put it, some form of **honour contest** - an escalation of trivia. A push, a shove, a “what are you staring at mate” and then an event that nobody wanted to happen. Over a quarter kill strangers. About half kill friends and acquaintances. The younger the killer the more likely he is to kill a stranger or somebody not close to him, such as a casual drinking partner.

When **men kill women** it is often a feature of the control over the behaviour of a sexual partner. “If I can’t have her, nobody else will”. In 61% of cases of when men kill women it is an intimate partner who is the victim, and in another 27% of cases it is another family member or a friend. In 10% of cases when men kill women they kill a stranger, and in all of Australia this accounts for about 10 cases per year. Dreadful and terrifying as this is, the risk of a woman being killed by a stranger is very very low.

When women kill males, they almost invariably kill an intimate partner or a male child.

Aboriginal people have enormously higher rates of offending and victimisation. Their rates for both are about seven times those of non-Indigenous people. Alcohol is present in 80% of Aboriginal offenders and about 70% of victims. Among non-Aboriginal victims and offenders alcohol is present much much less, but still there in around a quarter of cases. While Indigenous people have a very high homicide rates, their use of firearms in homicide is very rare (guns are used in around 5% of Aboriginal cases).

The proportion of homicide deaths by firearms has been declining in recent years, and now firearms are involved in about 20% of incidents, compared with about 35% twenty years ago. The most common homicide weapon is a sharp instrument, and the second most common, a blunt instrument.

Yet firearms are significant weapons in homicide and in 94% of firearms homicides the offender was a male. 1 in 5 of all firearm homicides was followed by the suicide of the offender. (The gunman, and it was nearly always a man, turned the gun on himself). 35% of all firearm homicides involved intimate partners.

46% of firearms incidents involved a weapon that is (now) prohibited or restricted. These incidents accounted for 55% of the victims of firearm homicide. The Government’s national gun buyback resulted in over 640,000 weapons being taken out of the community, and we will monitor the impact of this.
The important point to stress is that firearms homicides are more likely to be about relationship breakdown than about criminal activity such as robbery, drug disputes or contract killings. Both sets of categories, “personal” and “criminal” require different prevention and enforcement strategies.

It is obvious from all of these facts and figures that there are significant policy issues that we must grapple with. There are significant issues about relationship breakdown, but more important about why most people whose relationships break down do not resort to killing, yet some do. There are issues relating to firearms. Would people kill their partners anyway - does the presence of a gun make it quick and final, or would they reach for a knife?

We have a culture of murder on TV and in the movies, but do not have a culture of murder in Australia. There certainly is a culture of murder in the United States which, because of the fascination of murder and murderers, finds its way into every aspect of popular culture, and that finds its way onto our screens.

The USA has a rate 5 times that of Australia, and countries like Russia, Mexico and Croatia have rates much higher than the USA. Australia’s rate is similar to that of many northern European countries and Canada and New Zealand, but double that of Japan, Norway and Ireland.

Why this is so is a real mystery to criminologists, anthropologists, psychiatrists and psychologists. We all have distressing things happen to us, yet the vast overwhelming majority of us do not try to solve the problem by killing the antagonist. There are obviously some fundamental neurological and sociological unknowns. From a policy point of view, things like expanding the number of police, giving them better technology, setting longer prison sentences, imposing or abolishing the death penalty have had no effect on the homicide rate, which has remained fairly constant in most countries (though is falling in the US). Neither money nor science have helped us solve this activity, which has reached epidemic proportions in America, and which is the cause of so much fear in Australia. It seems however, that there are significant issues in education policy and mental health policy - much more so than in justice policy.

So to make inroads, a policy of homicide prevention would not be the right way to go, but a more general, cross-sectoral set of violence prevention activities are likely to yield some results.

We know that males are twice as likely to become victims of assault as are females. This applies both to younger (under 20) and older (over 50) people. The risk of assault for a male under 20 was 81 per 1000; compared to 9 per 1000 for a male over 50; and 4 per 1000 for a female over 50. Older females have the greatest fear, and the lowest risk. Unemployed people are twice as likely to be victims of assault as employed people.
**Offenders**

There are no definitive answers as to why individuals commit crimes. We do know that participation in crime declines with age. Property crime arrests peak at age 16, and drop to lower than half that by age 20. Violent crime arrests peak at age 18. However, young people who become involved in crime at the earliest ages - before they are 14 - tend to become the most persistent offenders, with longer criminal careers.

Major risk factors for youth crime are:

- low income and poor housing
- living in deteriorated inner city areas
- a high degree of impulsiveness and hyperactivity
- low intelligence and low school attainment
- poor parental supervision and harsh and erratic discipline
- parental conflict and broken families

Young offenders tend to be versatile and rarely specialise in particular types of crime, including violence. The *overwhelming majority* of young people do not commit crime.

We know that juveniles tend to commit crimes in groups, and that they are most likely male. Very few girls are in corrective institutions, and are more likely than boys to be held for non-criminal conduct.

Interviews with young offenders in the UK, meanwhile, suggest that their crimes are most commonly committed for material gain. However, a minority of offences, especially vandalism and taking vehicles without the owner’s consent, are committed for excitement, enjoyment or to relieve boredom.

We know that the probability of arrest increases with each subsequent arrest, and that a few offenders are responsible for a large number of arrests - about 5 percent of male offenders are chronic offenders, who account for about half of all known offending.

There were approximately 16,000 people in prison in December 1995. 4% were female and 96% were male. Almost one in five prisoners is Indigenous, and Indigenous persons have an imprisonment rate 17.5 times that of non-indigenous people.

Imprisonment rates vary around Australia. The NT, WA and NSW have rates well above the national rate, while Tasmania and Victoria have rates well below the national rate.
What we do know about criminals refers mainly to street criminals and repeat offenders. Sophisticated and white collar crime is a vast playing field and we don’t know very much about who criminals are, apart from the tiny minority who are caught.

Responses

Crime Prevention

Many people feel that “crime prevention” is something that is out of their control - that only professionals and police can address - its more about awareness and commitment, and everybody can be involved. Crime prevention and community safety includes a wide range of concerns - from accidents and hazards, right through to crimes of violence, as well as issues such as racism and sexual harassment.

There are two ways to prevent crime. The first is to make crime more difficult to commit, more risky and less rewarding by putting in place measures such as better security, increased surveillance and property marking. This is the most commonly understood type of crime prevention and can be applied to most situations in which crime is likely to occur. This approach targets the crime-prone situation rather than the offender. It is sometimes called situational crime prevention.

The second approach aims to prevent criminal behaviour. It addresses the underlying social causes of offending and seeks to influence the attitudes and behaviour of those most likely to offend so they are less inclined to do so. This is done by reducing the risk factors long known to be associated with offending (such as poor parenting and school failure) and enhancing protective factors (such as good parenting and school success). This approach targets the potential offender rather than the crime. It is sometimes called social crime prevention or criminality prevention.

Criminality prevention involves

* family-based prevention: strengthening families and improving parenting
* school-based prevention: enhancing the education of those most at risk of school failure, truancy and delinquency
* community-based prevention: providing recreational, social, employment and housing opportunities, especially for young people
* preventing reoffending: diverting known offenders from a criminal career
Techniques for reducing the risks of young people’s involvement in drug misuse, crime and other antisocial behaviour include:

* frequent home visiting by health professionals during pregnancy and infancy
* education in parenting
* high quality nursery education
* training children to ‘stop and think’ (cognitive and social skills training)
* anti-bullying initiatives in schools
  classroom management training for teachers

It is obvious that no one sector alone can prevent crime - a partnership is needed, and the Commonwealth needs to be in there developing a national crime prevention framework, the component parts of which can be tested in different parts of Australia, and the lessons learned built into best practice models for use elsewhere.