**Director’s overseas visits**

Stuart Ross, the Director of the National Centre for Crime and Justice Statistics (NCCJS), attended the four-day conference on Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation, run by the United States National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in Washington DC. The conference was attended by around 800 participants, and was oriented towards research with a policy development or program evaluation focus. The NCCJS has copies of the conference program and transcripts of the presentations.

Following the NIJ conference, Stuart had meetings with staff at the US Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, National Criminal Justice Reference Service (all in Washington) and the National Centre for State Courts (in Williamsburg, Virginia). From there he went to Statistics Canada in Ottawa, and the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office in London. One outcome of these visits has been the establishment of publication exchange arrangements with each organisation.

Some of the issues discussed that have a significant bearing on work by the NCCJS and State and Territory criminal justice agencies were:

- Work in the USA and Canada on establishing or expanding more complex, incident-based crime statistics systems (the National Incident Based Reporting Systems in the USA, and the Incident Based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey in Canada);
- Work by the National Centre for State Courts on case-mix approaches to court performance analysis; and
- The Statistics Canada “extranet” that has been set up to disseminate crime and justice statistics and to communicate with government agencies, advisory groups and other stakeholders.

**Crime and Safety Survey**

Approval has been granted to conduct the next national Crime and Safety Survey in April 2002. The core data items to be collected will be as in previous surveys: victimisation and reporting rates for break-in, attempted break-in and car theft for households, and robbery, assault and sexual assault for individuals. The possibility of extending sexual assault data to adult males, previously collected only for females aged 18 or over, is being investigated.

A small number of new data items will be included, replacing non-core items that were collected in 1998. New items to be tested include: fear of crime, what happened after the crime was reported to police, offender characteristics and seriousness of the incident.

Output requirements for the survey are also currently being considered. It is likely that there will be an initial release of key data items, followed by a publication containing more detailed analysis. A confidentialised unit record file will also be produced. If you are interested in the output from this survey, please contact Carol Soloff on (03) 9615 7384.

The 1999 NCCJS Convention included an information day with a number of speakers on the theme of performance measures in the crime and justice system. The papers have now been published with the title *Crime and Justice Statistics Convention 1999* and free copies are available by contacting the NCCJS.
October meetings of NCCJS
The next meetings of the advisory and consultative groups associated with the NCCJS will be held in Melbourne over 24-27 October.

In previous years, these meetings were held as part of the annual Crime and Justice Statistics Convention conducted by the NCCJS. A decision has been made to review the frequency of the Convention based on the availability of persons attending various forums throughout each year and demands on their time. Current plans are to schedule the next convention in Melbourne during October 2001.

The meetings that are being held in October 2000 are:
- National Crime Statistics Advisory Group, Tuesday 24 October;
- National Criminal Courts Advisory Group, Wednesday 25 October;
- National Crime and Safety Survey, Thursday 26 October;
- National Criminal Justice Statistics Framework, Thursday 26 October; and
- Australian Standard Offence Classification (ASOC) Implementation Working Group, Friday 27 October.

In addition to these, meetings of the advisory groups are also planned for February 2001. We are considering holding the meetings either before or after the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology conference being held on 21-23 February 2000 in Melbourne.

Juvenile Justice
The NCCJS has concentrated its statistical outputs on adults within the criminal justice system, but is now seeking to expand its collection to include juvenile justice. To achieve this end, the NCCJS has secured additional funding to explore the development of a juvenile justice collection.

The inclusion of juveniles would provide a more complete picture of the criminal justice system, would provide more data on patterns of entry into and exit out of the criminal justice system of a particular social group (young people), and would allow for the substantial expansion of existing data collections.

A Progress Report on Juvenile Justice has now been completed. The report presents the recommendations of a project to investigate the development of a juvenile justice data collection by the NCCJS. For further information, please contact Feodora Fomin on (03) 9615 7609.

National Criminal Courts Statistics Unit
The fifth issue of the Higher Criminal Courts, Australia publication (ABS Catalogue No. 4513.0) was released on 24 July 2000. This publication presents information on the flow of defendants through the Supreme and Intermediate courts for the 1998–99 financial year. For the first time, this edition included information on time taken to finalise the case for defendants who changed their plea.

Some key findings reported in the 1998–99 publication were:
- There were 18,426 defendants finalised in 1998–99, a 10% increase on the number finalised in the previous year.
- Excluding Queensland (for which figures are not available), 3,037 defendants maintained a not guilty plea throughout their trial. Of these, about half were acquitted of all charges.
- Excluding Queensland, in 58% of cases where a defendant initially pleaded not guilty to one or more charges, they later changed their plea to guilty. Generally where a defendant changed their plea from not guilty to guilty, it took more than twice as long to finalise the case as for those whose original plea was guilty.
- The median time taken to finalise cases was 21 weeks, the same as in 1997–98.
- The median age of defendants was 28 years, for both males and females.
- Tasmania reported the youngest median age of defendants at 24 years while Victoria reported the oldest at 31 years.

Copies of Higher Criminal Courts, Australia (ABS Cat. No. 4513.0) are available from the ABS for $22.00.

The National Criminal Courts Statistical Unit (NCCSU) has also embarked on a quality assurance program. This involves visiting each jurisdiction to investigate current systems usage and explore the possibilities for expanding the Higher Courts collection.

Of particular interest is the collection of offence and penalty information within each jurisdiction. The NCCSU will be testing a subset of offence and penalty data for 1999–00. Providing the information is reliable and comparable, it is intended that offence and penalty information will be included in future editions of the publication.

The next National Centre for Crime and Justice Statistics Convention is scheduled for October 2001 in Melbourne.
National Corrective Services Statistics Unit

Quarterly Custodial Collection

The June quarter 2000 issue of Corrective Services, Australia (ABS Cat. No. 4512.0) was released on 28 September 2000. Some of the key findings are:

- In the June quarter, the average daily number of prisoners in Australia was 20,828, an increase of less than 1% on the March quarter 2000.
- New South Wales and Western Australia made the greatest contributions to this increase, rising by 1% and 3% respectively.
- On 1 June 2000 the highest number of Indigenous persons in prison custody was recorded in New South Wales (1,158).
- The highest rate of imprisonment for the Indigenous population was in Western Australia with a rate of 3,010 Indigenous prisoners per 100,000 Indigenous population.

Copies of Corrective Services, Australia (ABS Cat. No. 4512.0) are available from the ABS for $20.00.

Prisoner Census

Data from the annual Prisoner Census were released in the report Prisoners in Australia, 1999 in June 2000. The data show that on the night of 30 June 1999:

- There were 21,538 prisoners in Australia, an imprisonment rate of 145 prisoners per 100,000 adult population.
- The highest imprisonment rates were in the Northern Territory and Western Australia with imprisonment rates of 453 and 217 prisoners per 100,000 adult population respectively.
- The lowest imprisonment rates were in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory (including prisoners held in New South Wales prisons) with imprisonment rates of 74 and 81 prisoners per 100,000 adult population respectively.
- The prisoner population increased by 8% in the 12 months between the 1998 and 1999 censuses with the number of male prisoners increasing by 1,395 (7%) and the number of female prisoners increasing by 237 (21%).
- The proportion of female prisoners increased from 5.7% to 6.4% of the prison population between 1998 and 1999.

Copies of Recorded Crime, Australia (ABS Cat. No. 4510.0) are available from the ABS for $31.00.

For the first time in seven years there was a decrease in the number of robbery victims recorded by police, from a high of 23,801 victims in 1998 to 22,590 victims in 1999.

National Crime Statistics Unit

The seventh in the series of the annual publication, Recorded Crime, Australia 1999 (ABS Cat. No. 4510.0) was released on 28 June 2000. This collection has now changed its classificatory basis for offences from the Australian National Classification of Offences (ANCO) to the Australian Standard Offence Classification (ASOC). This new offence classification has led to significant improvements in the comparability of crime statistics on both a State/Territory and national level.

Key findings from the 1999 national publication include:

- For the first time in seven years there was a decrease in the number of robbery victims recorded, from a high of 23,801 victims in 1998 to 22,590 victims in 1999.
- The number of robberies involving a firearm has also decreased to a seven-year low of 6% compared to 16% in 1993.
- Murder victims increased by 20%, from 285 victims in 1998 to 342 victims in 1999. Of the murder victims in 1999, 21 victims were accounted for by the discovery of 12 bodies in Snowtown, South Australia and 9 victims were related to two family murder/suicide incidents in Western Australia.
- Theft (not including motor vehicle theft) was the most commonly recorded crime in the collection, with a victimisation rate of 3,218 victims per 100,000 people.
- Of all sexual assault victims, four in five were females, and almost one in two were females aged under 20 years.

The National Crime Statistics Unit (NCSU) has recently begun preliminary investigation into the development of an Offender Based Statistics collection. The initial scoping exercise was conducted in late 1999 and the concept has been raised at the most recent Police Statisticians and NCSU Advisory Group meetings in an effort to seek endorsement. A presentation will be made to the NCSU Board of Management, and an Advisory Group workshop will be conducted to establish the premise for a more detailed scoping exercise, the results of which will be presented to the Police Statisticians in a February 2001 meeting.
On a smaller scale, an analysis has been undertaken looking at the expansion of the current weapon use classification to include knife and syringe. Documented support has been received from several jurisdictions and, at this stage, the expanded classification will be operational from 1 January 2001.

Drugs - ABCI Consultancy

After the successful outcome of an earlier joint project between the ABS and Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence (ABCI), which culminated in 1999 with the publication of the National Illicit Drug Statistics Framework (NIDSF), the ABS is continuing to foster a close relationship with the ABCI through the provision of statistical services and support.

In September 2000 the ABS outposted a statistician to the ABCI to assist in the preparation of the Australian Illicit Drugs Report (AIDR) and the implementation of the national standards contained within the NIDSF.

It is expected that the consultancy will be beneficial to both the ABCI and the ABS, in that it will progress the shared goal of establishing a quality illicit drug statistics collection that will satisfy the joint requirements of the ABCI Australian Illicit Drug Report (AIDR) and those of the ABS’ National Crime Statistics Unit (NCSU).

It is anticipated that the benefits of implementing the national standards outlined in the NIDSF, that is, of providing reliable and comparable State/Territory data, will not only be enjoyed by users of these two collections but ultimately by all users of criminal justice drug data.

National Crime & Justice Statistical Framework

The National Crime and Justice Statistical Framework is intended to provide a high-level structure for organising, collecting and reporting information about crime and the criminal justice system. It will provide a conceptual tool that outlines how crime and justice statistical information should be structured. Our key stakeholders have been consulted as part of the development of the Framework, and now a Relationship Model and a Data Dictionary are being circulated for comment. Release no. 1 of the Framework will be available in early 2001.

Other news

- The NCCJS has been providing advice and assistance to agencies in WA and NT who are in the process of mapping the ASOC to their legislation. In the near future the NCCJS will be investigating the possibility of developing an offence seriousness index.
- A special edition of the Australian Year Book will be produced by the ABS next year to commemorate the anniversary of Federation. Dr Adam Graycar, Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), has written an article entitled Crime in Australia - A History to accompany the Crime and Justice chapter.
- The National Civil Justice Statistical Unit is continuing to provide quality assurance to data on behalf of the Productivity Commission. A Casemix approach is being tested, with murder data being produced by the end of 2000.
- In conjunction with the AIC, the ABS will be undertaking further analysis of national crime and safety data on repeat victimisation and reporting behaviour. The ABS will also be investigating the feasibility of producing small area statistics for crime victimisation using a number of data sources.

Staff news

There have been more farewells in the NCCJS in recent months with four staff leaving the ABS. Both Tony Ward and Eng Chee have left the ABS after a number of years with the NCCJS and we have also said farewell to Betty Velentzas and Rebecca Altman. We have welcomed Amira Peters to the NCCSU and Laurel Johnson to the Coordination and Analysis Unit.

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