

CRIME PERCEPTIONS

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH REPORT



Prepared for the
Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet

October 2023



GAME CHANGERS



RESEARCH DESIGN



RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative component

- The qualitative design matrix is shown in the table opposite. It was designed to provide geographic coverage across a range of different Queensland locations/settings.
- A total of 9 focus groups, with n=45 participants, took part in the qualitative research.
- All participants were provided with an incentive to thank them for their time.
- All fieldwork was conducted online.
- The fieldwork took place between 16th – 17th October 2023.

Groups	Location	Demographics
2 groups	Northern Queensland	Mixture of age and gender
2 groups	Far North Queensland	Mixture of age and gender
2 groups	Wide Bay	Mixture of age and gender
2 groups	South East Queensland	Mixture of age and gender
1 group	Mount Isa, Western Queensland and Outback	Mixture of age and gender

KEY FINDINGS



CRIME IS A TOP CONCERN

- Crime – and specifically youth crime – is a top of mind issue across Queensland.
- Youth crime is a standout issue in Townsville, and to a lesser extent in Mt Isa. In other areas of the State it is a concern, but it sits alongside a range of other concerns.
- Other competing issues are:
 - Housing
 - Rising prices/ housing shortages due to incoming residents from other States
 - Soaring rental costs
 - Homelessness
 - Health
 - Access to specialists
 - Staff stretched/ Under-staffed
 - Wider cost of living issues
 - Public transport
 - Inadequate frequency of service
 - Unsafe
 - Use of cash for payment
- Residents have very mixed views on how rates of youth crime in their area compare to other parts of the State.

SOCIAL MEDIA DOMINATES

- Social media – and predominantly Facebook community groups – are the main source of information for local residents across Queensland. This is particularly the case for those living in regional towns.
 - There is recognition that social media is opinion-based, but once a post is liked by 30+ others, or other posts confirm the information, this is seen as indicating accurate or trustworthy information.
 - Older residents more likely than others to view social media/Facebook as providing a platform where young people brag about their offending behaviour by sharing videos.
 - There is debate as to whether residents' perceptions of youth crime are accurate or whether this has been 'inflated' by the attention provided to this type of news on Facebook.
- Similarly powerful is Word of Mouth, which is both a main source, but also a secondary, confirmatory source used to supplement social media information.
- Traditional media is less frequently mentioned as a source of information on local news. There is an expectation that local media outlets undertake some level of fact-checking.
 - Local radio
 - TV news (more frequently mentioned by older residents).
 - Local newspaper websites and hard copy newspapers.
- While local council or state government are more trusted, they are less likely to be mentioned as a source of information.



I prefer to listen to social media community pages than any of the real media because you can find out a lot more from the horses mouth.”
Far North Queensland participant



It's not new, the crime, but with social media it's more in your face.”
Mt Isa, Western Queensland and Outback participant

DO RESIDENTS FEEL SAFE?

- Residents mostly feel safe outside, in their local areas, during daytime, and safety tends to correlate directly with the affluence of the suburb.
- Irrespective of location, residents spoke of 'hot spots', rougher suburbs or central CBD areas known for being more dangerous, that they would tend to avoid, particularly after dark.
- There was some limited personal experience of crime, with residents mentioning bag snatching and assault and wider awareness of more frequent car stealing and burn outs, car jacking, house break ins, shop theft, mugging and personal assault. One Wide Bay participant had their home broken into twice and a Maryborough participant who lived near a main road (the highway) regularly heard burnouts and police pursuits.
- Changes to NT laws meant that Mt Isa residents were aware of NT residents travelling to Mt Isa specifically to buy alcohol, which was leading to more drunkenness and unlawful behaviour.
- There was a clear gender difference, with female participants far more likely to describe feeling unsafe, and describing ways in which they have altered their behaviour:
 - Applying car locks
 - Installing dead locks
 - Installing security cameras
 - Joining a gym, rather than running early in the morning
 - Removing/hiding personal positions to prevent opportunistic theft



You're listening (for the sound of a break-in). Your subconscious is on edge, waiting to have to protect your family .. You put your car keys under your pillow ... and 'cos it's a small community, it feels more personal. You're only two degrees away."
Mt Isa, Western Queensland and Outback participant



You're making sure that you're sliding doors and everything's triple locked, and then you're hiding your car keys because you know that's what they're coming for."
Far North Queensland participant

POLICE ARE DOING BEST THEY CAN

- Across the State there is widespread appreciation that the Police are doing a good job in very challenging circumstances.
- They are seen as visible in their communities, and with good community connections (especially in regional locations).
- They are quick to respond, seen as doing all that they can and they often already know the likely perpetrators.
- While not critical of current levels of police visibility, greater visibility is considered reassuring, depending on the type of visibility. High visibility of them chasing stolen cars or dealing with trouble helps to reassure but also reinforces that the problems exist and are not being fixed.



As townspeople we feel for the Police – they can only do so much – and the courts just put (young offenders) back on the street.”
Mt Isa, Western Queensland and Outback participant



You can hear them patrolling the highway, but are they necessarily coming into this housing estate, unless there’s something happening? Probably not.”
Far North Queensland participant



Connecting with the community is good, in their mobile van or on the beat, but seeing them go down the road with their lights on is not so good.”
South East Queensland participant

JUDICIARY SYSTEM IS SEEN AS NOT DELIVERING

- However, Police efforts are seen as being hampered by the role played by the judicial system.
 - There is a consistent view that young offenders are not given impactful sentences, and so there is only a limited sense of their actions have meaningful repercussions. Without judicial consequences that have a deterrent affect, the Police are limited in their impact.
 - There is a perception that a lot of youth crime is committed by repeat offenders who cycle through the system, with no meaningful deterrent or rehabilitation.
 - Being sent to a detention centre is seen as preferable for some young people than staying in an unsafe home, so sentencing has a limited deterrent affect.



The Police are doing a great job but the justice system is where it falls down ... it's a revolving door and the detention centre was at 173% capacity the other day."

Mt Isa, Western Queensland and Outback participant



The deterrents aren't working – they don't match the crime ... if you lock them up locally, they're heroes."

Mt Isa, Western Queensland and Outback participant



The courts are doing the complete opposite to the Police ... keep getting the same kids over and over again and the courts just keep letting them go every single time ... so the kids just keep pretending they're invincible."

Wide Bay participant



The justice system lets the Police down because they do have the sentencing there but they don't give it."

Far North Queensland participant

MIXED RESPONSE TO THE CRIME DATA

- Most residents accept the data presented in the ABC article is from reliable sources, e.g. Qld Police and ABS, with some commenting that it in part reflected some of the discussion of the evening. In one of the Wide Bay groups where there was discussion about their belief that youth at the moment seem to be a lot more aggressive and violent than in previous times, and they felt this was reflected in the data showing a long term increase in assault.
- However:
 - For many – particularly in Townsville and Mt Isa – the downward trajectory of the data does not feel reflective of their local experience.
 - There is interest in seeing localised data for their town/region to get a more accurate picture.
 - This mis-match between data and personal perception leads some residents to query the data – are crimes under-reported, is the data out of date?
 - Others questions whether their perception of crime levels are distorted by social media coverage.



We're fed in the news that crime rates are out of control ... there's a bit of sensationalism."
South East Queensland participant



Like media and social media throwing it in our face ... it makes us feel like it's more prevalent that it actually is."
Far North Queensland participant



At least it's being acknowledged – we see Anastasia talking about it. Even though we saw the graphs that show its coming down, she knows she's gotta do something about it."
South East Queensland

YOUTH CRIME SEEN AS MULTI-FACETED PROBLEM

- The majority of residents see the underlying reasons for youth crime as a **highly complex, multi-faceted problem**, frequently reflecting **multi-generational trauma** and **deprivation**.
- There is a relatively widespread perception – particularly in those areas where youth crime is a bigger issue (Townsville and Mt Isa) – that young people committing crimes do so because they live in **unsafe homes**, due to issues with abuse, addiction and housing insecurity. As such, they believe young people are on the streets to escape home, and this leaves them vulnerable to involvement in criminal activities.
- Among those with the perception of ‘unsafe homes’, there is a view that the **Detention Centre is perceived as preferable to home**.
 - It provides a safe space, free from physical harm
 - Basic needs are met, e.g. food and a bed
 - Spend time with friends, who are also sentenced
- Other residents directly call out **poor parenting and/or lack of positive adult role models**, in terms of lack of boundaries, structure, and guidance, and that this had led young people to not appreciate that ‘bad’ behaviour has consequences. In turn, ‘poor’ parenting was sometimes viewed as being partially a consequence of financial pressure for both parents to be working, leaving child/ren unattended and without supervision; at other times it was thought reflective of generational issues of poverty, poor education, drug and alcohol issues etc.
- Those working in sectors, or roles, with contact with younger people are significantly more likely to perceive the problem in this way, and recognise the challenges inherent in reducing youth offending.
- While all participants spoke of the importance of suitable repercussions for committing youth crime, those whose job, or lifestyle, do not expose them to younger people are more likely to see the lack of meaningful, impactful consequences as contributing to the problem. This group are also more likely to mention that there are not enough positive, constructive things for young people to do.

YOUTH CRIME IMPACTED BY PEER PRESSURE

- In addition to these complex issues arising from social deprivation, residents also see youth crime as a short term consequence of both peer pressure and social media.
 - Older teens are seen as a negative influence on younger children, influencing them to take part in criminal activity
 - They perceive a competitive element to youth crime, each offender trying to do 'better' than the other, and that being seen to be involved is a 'badge of honour'.
 - The sharing of video footage on social media is seen as central to this competitive aspect.
 - There is a perception that for young people coming from unsafe homes, their friends become their family in lieu of adequate parenting.



12, 13 and 14 year old girls and boys, they've got knives and they're recording everything and they're uploading it on social media to get noticed and to get fame. They get caught by the Police but nothing happens 'cause they're underage, so the next night, they're out there doing it again."
South East Queensland participant



They take videos, and then have competitions of who can do the worst ... and get their five seconds of fame."
Mt Isa, Western Queensland and Outback participant



Their behaviour is catching. They think it's a joke – there are no repercussions, they get away with it."
Mt Isa, Western Queensland and Outback participant



A lot of it is fuelled by social media, in particular, Tik Tok. They're all trying to out do each other."
Far North Queensland participant

LOW AWARENESS OF INITIATIVES

- Irrespective of location, there is low awareness of initiatives aimed at preventing youth crime. Residents have only vague knowledge of what's being done. Those working in jobs related to young people in some way, have greater knowledge.
- The range of initiatives identified include:
 - Police presence and involvement with school-based programs
 - Police project Booyah
 - Programs run by PCYC
 - Mental health related programs run by Headspace
 - Grass roots programs set up by ex-Police
 - Variety of programs run by Church groups
 - Trade skill classes for at-risk young people
 - Provision of breakfast at school
 - Farm camp/ Bush camps
 - Deadly choices
 - Operation Hard Yakka
- Those in SE Queensland mentioned the building of a new detention centre, but are concerned it'll take years to build and impact the problem.

FUTURE SOLUTIONS

- There is no settled view among residents about what needs to be done. It is seen as an intractable problem that will always be present.
- The few suggestions residents have focus on solutions aimed at both young people and at parents:

➤ Young people

- Increase penalties/sentencing for young people
- Provide safe places for young people to spend time, engaged in positive activities, and for these places to open longer hours (into the evening) so that they have somewhere safe to be, other than home, after school and before bed.
- Dedicated schools, or school programs, focused on actively trying to engage children who are disengaged from education or training.
- Step up these programs early, in the last years of primary school or first years of high school, before criminal behaviour becomes habitual or the norm for young people.
- Continuity of funding for initiatives, so they are not short term, and there is time to build trusting relationships.
- Need for positive role models for young people.
- Active mentoring for young people at risk.
- Reduce scope for young people to share videos (e.g. remove mobile phones).



Youth crime is a symptom ... there's a lack of importance on education, on emotional regulation and there are many unsafe homes."
Mt Isa, Western Queensland and Outback participant



If you don't where your kid is, you don't get your family tax credit."
Mt Isa, Western Queensland and Outback participant

➤ Parents

- More effective programs to address parental addiction.
- Impose financial penalties on parents, e.g. reduce Centrelink payments.
- Removal of children from parents who are deemed 'unfit' to parent.
- Greater societal and parental value placed on education.

ABOUT IPSOS

Ipsos is the third largest market research company in the world, present in 90 markets and employing more than 18,000 people.

Our research professionals, analysts and scientists have built unique multi-specialist capabilities that provide powerful insights into the actions, opinions and motivations of citizens, consumers, patients, customers or employees. Our 75 business solutions are based on primary data coming from our surveys, social media monitoring, and qualitative or observational techniques.

“Game Changers” – our tagline – summarises our ambition to help our 5,000 clients to navigate more easily our deeply changing world.

Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos is listed on the Euronext Paris since July 1st, 1999. The company is part of the SBF 120 and the Mid-60 index and is eligible for the Deferred Settlement Service (SRD).

ISIN code FR0000073298, Reuters ISOS.PA, Bloomberg
IPS:FP
www.ipsos.com

GAME CHANGERS

In our world of rapid change, the need for reliable information to make confident decisions has never been greater.

At Ipsos we believe our clients need more than a data supplier, they need a partner who can produce accurate and relevant information and turn it into actionable truth.

This is why our passionately curious experts not only provide the most precise measurement, but shape it to provide True Understanding of Society, Markets and People.

To do this we use the best of science, technology and know-how and apply the principles of security, simplicity, speed and substance to everything we do.

So that our clients can act faster, smarter and bolder. Ultimately, success comes down to a simple truth:
You act better when you are sure.