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NDARC Monograph Number 65

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Conflicts of interest

Two authors (Anthony Shakeshaft and Bernie Shakeshaft) are brothers. Author Bernie Shakeshaft is the founding manager of BackTrack and was manager of the program during the period of this research. Author Maple is based at the University of New England which is in the same town where the BackTrack program was established. When requested, she provided informal, adventitious and voluntary advice about this research to BackTrack's manager (Bernie Shakeshaft), informal advisory team, staff and program participants, and to the wider community, to interpret and explain the activities, status and purpose of the research.

ABSTRACT

Background:

There is an absence of high-quality evidence about which programs are most effective in reducing juvenile offending and crime recidivism.

Aims:

This study identifies the most common types of offences involving high-risk young people, describes the demographic characteristics of the persons of interest, examines the extent to which a community prevention program (BackTrack) is associated with reductions in offences, and identifies the perceptions of key stakeholders about the impact of BackTrack.

Methods:

Routinely collected crime data were obtained from 1999-2013 for Armidale (the BackTrack community). Descriptive analyses identified the most common offences and their characteristics. Segmented regression analysis of an interrupted time series estimated BackTrack's impact, with segments specified for pre (1999-2005) and post (2006-2013) the commencement of BackTrack. A thematic analysis was applied the perceptions of police officers and the magistrate in Armidale.

Results:

The most common types of offences were: break and enter dwelling; malicious damage to property; assault (non-domestic violence); and trespass. Most persons of interest were male, aged 14-17 years. A statistically significant reduction from pre- to post-commencement of BackTrack was identified for all four of the most common offences ($p \leq 0.05$). A key perception was that outcomes are optimised when key stakeholders in community programs and the criminal justice system work together.

Conclusions:

BackTrack appropriately targets high-risk young people and is effective in reducing the most common types of offences.

INTRODUCTION

High-risk or vulnerable young people can be defined as “young people who through a combination of their circumstances and adolescent risk-taking behaviour, are at risk of not realising their potential to achieve positive life outcomes” (Victorian Government, 2008: 1). This vulnerability is reflected in crime statistics: the highest rate of offending occurs between the ages of 12-24 years (ATSIC, 1997 cited in Cuneen, 2001). Although the majority of crime is associated with young people, rates of crime are not evenly distributed across all young people. Higher rates of crime are associated with a range of social factors, including childhood abuse, low socio-economic status (SES) and minority cultural identity (Mitchel, 2011; ODPM, 2005; Schmied, 2006; Williams; 2009; DHS; 2010). Aboriginal Australians, for example, have had a recent history of dispossession, racism, oppression and low SES which, in turn, is reflected in the rates with which they are involved in crime: more than 50% of 10-17 year old juvenile detainees are Aboriginal, despite Aboriginal Australians comprising an estimated 2% of the Australian population (AIC, 2008; AIHW, 2011). Furthermore, Aboriginal young people are 26 times more likely to be incarcerated in comparison to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Richards and Lyneham, 2010).

Programs aimed at minimising the involvement of high-risk young people in the criminal justice system (CJS) can be categorised as primary, secondary or tertiary prevention (Richards, Rosevear and Gilbert, 2011). Primary prevention strategies are implemented in response to the presence of risk factors, such as poor school attendance, before offending has commenced. Australian examples include the New South Wales ‘Youth on the Go Program’, which is a mentoring-based initiative (Keen, 2011), and the Western Australia ‘Caversham Training and Enterprise Centre’, which provides alternative approaches to education and training to prevent disengagement from formal education (Caversham Training and Enterprise Centre, 2010). Secondary prevention strategies target offending behaviour at the earliest possible stage, for which mentoring-based programs have also been established in Australia and New Zealand (Delfabbro and Day, 2003 cited in Richards, Rosevear and Gilbert, 2011). Tertiary strategies target with those already engaged in the CJS and aim to prevent crime recidivism. Relevant strategies include diversion programs, which can occur at different points in the CJS ranging from police warnings to sentencing conditions (Bargen, 2010), and youth justice conferencing, which allows cases involving young people to be addressed outside formal court proceedings with a view to utilising detention as a worst-case scenario (NSW Young Offenders Act, 1997; Smith and Weatherburn, 2012; DJJ, 2013; DJJ, 2009’; Luke and Lind).

A common problem across these different types of programs is that there is little evidence for their effectiveness: there is an absence of high-quality research to determine which programs are most effective for different high-risk young people in minimising juvenile offending (Richards, Rosevear and Gilbert, 2011: 5). Although many programs appear to be successful from case studies or observational reporting, there is little evidence for the effectiveness of programs from more rigorous evaluations (Richards, Rosevear and Gilbert, 2011). Similarly, a 2012 review concluded that the level of evidence for the effectiveness of interventions targeting multiple risk factors among high-risk young people was weak, although it did also identify that the only interventions that appeared to achieve at least some improvement on more than one risk factor were multi-component strategies (Jackson et al., 2012).

A multi-component, community-based intervention program for young people at high risk of involvement in crime was established in Armidale in NSW in 2006 (Shakeshaft 2009). Consistent with the findings of reviews (Richards, Rosevear and Gilbert, 2011; Jackson et al., 2012) this program, called BackTrack, has not been adequately evaluated. A more adequate evaluation requires implementing a number of sequential steps: determining the specific crime types that are most

relevant to the aims of the program; understanding the characteristics of those crimes; examining whether the program is associated with reduced crime rates; and obtaining key stakeholders' views to explore the nature of the relationship between the program components and crime rates. This process would help measure the impact of BackTrack and provide an evaluation framework that can be used by other programs in other communities, to begin to increase the quality of evaluations of programs for young people at high-risk of involvement in the CJS.

AIMS

This paper aims to:

1. Determine which offences are most commonly associated with males aged 14-17 years who have a residential postcode in Armidale NSW (the primary target group for the BackTrack program).
2. Describe the demographic characteristics of the persons of interest for the offences that occur most commonly and the characteristics of those offences (age, gender, aboriginal status, location, day and time).
3. Identify whether BackTrack is associated with reductions in the number of offences that most commonly involve males aged 14-17 years in Armidale.
4. Obtain the perceptions of key stakeholders about: (a) their understanding of BackTrack; (b) the offences that occur most commonly among BackTrack participants and whether this has changed over time; (c) whether BackTrack has been effective in reducing crime rates; and (d) features of the youth justice system that influence crime recidivism.

METHODS

Ethics

Ethics approvals were obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of New South Wales and the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council.

Study design

This study is a sequential mixed methods approach that uses quantitative analysis of routinely collected data followed by qualitative analyses of key stakeholders' perceptions. The quantitative component comprises a cross-sectional analysis of police incident data for young people for the period 1999-2013. It also comprises a pre/post evaluation of the impact of the BackTrack program on the frequency of offences, using segmented regression analysis, with a change point at the time of intervention. Consistent with a multiple baseline evaluation design (a type of stepped wedge design), the same quantitative data were analysed for a community without BackTrack to examine the extent to which any observed changes in the BackTrack community were likely to be due to the BackTrack program rather than an alternative explanation (Hawkins et al., 2007). The qualitative component comprises semi-structured interviews with the local magistrate and police, as well as consultation with BackTrack staff.

Community selection

The community selected is Armidale, a regional community with a population of 24,105 (ABS, 2011) in North West NSW, Australia. It was selected because it is the community where the BackTrack program has been running since 2006. Given this evaluation is of one program in one community, it uses pre/post evaluation design, developed using the principles of complex interventions, which indicates it is easily transferable to other communities. The process of its development and implementation is standardised and replicable, even though the specific program activities can be tailored to different communities (Campbell et al., 2007; Craig et al., 2008). The second independent community selected for the quantitative analysis was Tamworth, a regional city with a population of

27,511 that is located 111 kilometres south of Armidale (ABS, 2014). It was selected because its geographic location is similar to Armidale, but it is a sufficient distance to minimise any BackTrack program contamination between the two communities.

Population of interest

The population of interest is males aged 14-17 years, which are the demographic characteristics identified by BackTrack staff as being most representative of BackTrack participants. Virtually all participants are involved in the CJS and are at high-risk of this involvement escalating to juvenile detention or imprisonment in adult jails.

Intervention

Backtrack has two broad objectives: to provide alternative activities for young people to reduce their exposure to police and their engagement in anti-social behaviour; and to increase their ability to cope more effectively when they are exposed to high-risk situations, through the provision of alternative pathways to complete schooling and formal learning, and the provision of psychologically-based programs, such as mindfulness and motivational interviewing, to improve their resilience and mental health (BackTrack 2014).

Backtrack is based on a number of principles. It comprises: multiple components, to address a range of problem areas for young people (e.g. mental health, employment-related skills, legal issues); flexibility in program delivery and attendance, to suit the continually changing needs of young people; non-timed completion of all program components, to allow for young people to progress at their own rate whilst developing a sense of responsibility; and active community involvement in the delivery of the program, to improve communication between young people and authority figures (e.g. magistrate, police), create training and work experience opportunities through local businesses, and foster sustainability through community goodwill and funding contributions (BackTrack 2014).

The BackTrack principles have five core components: 1. Engagement of participants, their families and the community; 2. Skills training to increase participants' self-esteem and employment prospects, including job skills; 3. Personal development to enable participants to more effectively regulate their behaviour through a better understanding of the connection between their thoughts, feelings and behaviours; 4.Case management to improve their life-skills and better manage everyday challenges, such as personal hygiene, housing, finance and legal issues; 5. Identity/Culture to create a sense of belonging or connectedness to others, family, community and culture (BackTrack 2014).

Measures

Quantitative Analysis

De-identified, routinely collected, unit record police incident data were obtained to identify the relative frequency of different types of offences involving young people aged 12-19 years with a residential postcode in Armidale, NSW (Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research [BOCSAR], 2014). Data from 1999-2013 inclusive were requested to examine a minimum pre-intervention period of seven years prior to the commencement of BackTrack in Armidale (1999-2005) and a post-intervention period of eight years (2006-2013). Three types of data were requested: the type of offence; characteristics of the incident; and characteristics of the person of interest.

Type of offence. As summarised in Table 1, data pertaining to all 22 offence categories used by BOCSAR were obtained, along with all 54 sub-categories (the specific incident types within each offence category). This provided a total of 67 unique incident types (all sub-categories and categories with no sub-categories).Of these 67 unique incident types, 24 were excluded from further analysis: 20 because there were no incidents of that type recorded for 14-17 year old males in Armidale between 1999 and 2013 (see shaded categories in Table 1); and the 4 driving offences because BackTrack staff indicated that their participants were very rarely charged with driving offences. This left 44 incident types for analysis.

Characteristics of the incident. Variables obtained were incident number, event date (date the incident was recorded by police), incident date, incident time, postcode where the incident occurred, offence category, offence sub-category, time of offence, incident day, and location of incident.

Characteristics of the person of interest (POI). Variables obtained were incident number, residential postcode, age, gender, aboriginal status, offence category, and offence sub-category.

Table 1: Categories and subcategories of BOCSAR crime data

Categories (N=22)		Sub-Categories (n=54)	
1	Homicide	1	Murder*
		2	Attempted murder*
		3	Murder accessory, conspiracy*
		4	Manslaughter – not driving*
		5	Driving causing death*
2	Assault	6	Domestic violence related
		7	Non-domestic violence related
		8	Assault Police
3	Sexual offences	9	Sexual assault
		10	Indecent assault, Act of indecency
		11	Other sexual offense
4	Abduction and kidnapping		
5	Robbery	12	Robbery without a weapon
		13	Robbery with a firearm*
		14	Robbery with a weapon not a firearm
6	Blackmail and extortion*		
7	Harassment, threatening behaviour and private nuisance		
8	Other offences against the person		
9	Theft	15	Break and enter – dwelling
		16	Break and enter – non-dwelling
		17	Receiving or handling stolen goods
		18	Motor vehicle theft
		19	Steal from motor vehicle
		20	Steal from retail store
		21	Steal from dwelling
		22	Steal from person
		23	Stock theft
		24	Fraud
		25	Other theft
10	Arson		
11	Malicious damage to property		
12	Drug offences	26	Possession and/or use of cocaine*
		27	Possession and/or use of narcotics*
		28	Possession and/or use of cannabis
		29	Possession and/or use of amphetamines*
		30	Possession and/or use of ecstasy*
		31	Possession and/or use of other drugs
		32	Dealing, trafficking in cocaine*
		33	Dealing, trafficking in narcotics*

		34	Dealing, trafficking in cannabis*
		35	Dealing, trafficking in amphetamines*
		36	Dealing, trafficking in ecstasy
		37	Dealing, trafficking in other drugs*
		38	Cultivating cannabis
		39	Manufacture drug*
		40	Importing drugs*
		41	Other drug offences
13	Prohibited and regulated weapons offences		
14	Disorderly conduct	42	Trespass
		43	Offensive conduct
		44	Offensive language
		45	Criminal intent
15	Betting and gaming offences*		
16	Liquor offences		
17	Prostitution offences*		
18	Against justice procedures	46	Escape Custody
		47	Breach Apprehended Violence Order
		48	Breach bail conditions
		49	Fail to appear
		50	Resist or hinder officer
19	Transport regulatory offenses		
20	Driving offences	51	Drive in a manner or with speed dangerous**
		52	Drive while disqualified**
		53	PCA**
		54	Other driving offences**
21	Other offences		
22	Pornography offences		

*Excluded because no incidents recorded for 14-17 year old males in Armidale between 1999 and 2013.

**Excluded because irrelevant to BackTrack participants.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were collected by semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in Armidale.

Who was selected and why? The three interviewees were the Magistrate in Armidale, the police Youth Liaison Officer (YLO) and the police Crime Prevention Officer (CPO). They were selected because of their expertise in working with young people and the offences they commit in Armidale. They were also selected because their different professional roles mean that they have different perspectives on working with high-risk young people. The Magistrate represents a judicial perspective and has responsibility for imposing sentences, including detention or diversion options. The police officers directly respond to, and record, potentially criminal incidents from two different perspectives. The YLO is more acutely aware of offences from a youth standpoint, whereas the CPO provides a broader policing perspective. The Magistrate has been working in Armidale for 18 months (2.5 years total). The YLO has been a police officer in Armidale for 14 years (24 years total). The CPO has been a police officer in Armidale for four years (19 years total).

Interview questions. Participants were asked five sets of questions (Appendix 1). First, they were asked about their professional background, particular interests, their understanding of Backtrack, and their awareness of young people who are Backtrack participants. The purpose of these questions was to assess the interviewees' level of experience in Armidale and in their profession, identify possible explanations for differences in their views and gauge the extent of their understanding of BackTrack.

Second, they were shown an analysis of BOCSAR data indicating the most commonly occurring incidents among 14-17 year olds and were asked to comment on what types of crimes young people aged 14-17 were most likely to be engaged in, the extent to which these most commonly occurring incidents were relevant to the BackTrack participants, and why. The purpose of these questions was to identify the extent to which key stakeholders' perceptions align with the most common incidents identified in the BOCSAR data.

Third, they were shown analyses of change over time for the most common incident types and asked to comment on these trends for 14-17 year olds (the target population for BackTrack) and, for the purposes of comparison, the same trends for younger (12 and 13 year olds) and older (18 and 19 year olds) age groups. The purpose of this was to utilise their experience to identify possible alternative explanations (apart from BackTrack) for changes in trends over time.

Fourth, they were asked to rate the effectiveness of BackTrack, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1= very detrimental, 5=very beneficial), in terms of preventing involvement in criminal incidents, managing participants' legal affairs, preventing crime recidivism, and reducing the severity of crimes committed by BackTrack participants. These questions were designed to identify the different views of relevant experts about the likely extent to which BackTrack has had an impact on these four different outcomes.

Finally, they were asked about their views of what works in reducing offending. The purpose of this question was to explore the extent to which their views about effective mechanisms are consistent with the BackTrack program components.

Statistical methods

Quantitative Methods

All quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, version 22. The frequency with which the 44 incident types were recorded by police for males aged 14-17 years with a residential postcode in Armidale

was graphed in a bar chart (Figure 1). The four most common police incident types occurred at least 250 times and were selected for further analyses: malicious damage to property; break and enter-dwellings; assault (non-domestic violence); and trespass. The cut-off of 250 incidents represents a balance between optimising the statistical power of the analysis (by including the highest number of incidents) and identifying as wide a range of variables as possible on which the BackTrack program might have a positive impact. Descriptive analyses were performed to identify the demographic characteristics of the persons of interest for these four most common incident types, and the characteristics of those incidents.

To assess any change in the number of the offences between 1999-2005 and 2006-2012 (coinciding with the periods before and after BackTrack was implemented), these four most common police incident types were graphed over time. Separately for incident type, the data were grouped into six monthly time points. This was chosen rather than three month time points (i.e. quarters) to avoid having cells with zero counts. A segmented regression analysis was undertaken for each incident type, to test the statistical significance of any changes from pre- to post-BackTrack. The continuous independent variable was the number of incidents in Armidale among 14-17 year old males (crime), and the dependant variable was pre vs post BackTrack (intervention), including an interaction term (crime x time) to assess the impact of BackTrack on crime over time. The effect of BackTrack is summarised by the interaction term (the *trend change*), which represents the change in the trend of annual crime rates following the introduction of Backtrack. Tests were performed to check that the assumptions of the regression analyses were met, in particular whether autocorrelation was present (see Appendix 2 for details of these tests).

Qualitative Methods

The quantitative analyses are useful to identify patterns in the data but they are less useful for understanding why or how these patterns have occurred (Mays and Pope, 1999 cited in Chow et al 2010). If it appears that crime incidents among young people in Armidale have decreased over time, for example, are there factors in the CJS that may explain that observed pattern of results other than the BackTrack program? Alternatively, if BackTrack does appear to have had a positive impact, what are the critical program components that seem to be most effective?

All qualitative data were analysed using N-VIVO, version 10. The thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used. Our specific approach was inductive (top down, theory driven) as data (e.g. interview transcripts) were collected according to particular research questions and aims to complement the quantitative results. For example, interview questions were based on theory (e.g. effectiveness of the youth justice approach) or guided by particular research questions (e.g. does BackTrack influence recidivism among 14-17 year old males in Armidale?).

Given this study explored the interviewees' experiences and opinions about a concept (i.e. the youth justice system) that is highly likely to reflect their social, demographic and cultural constructions, a constructionist approach to data analysis was used. Specifically, the analysis comprised six steps: 1. Data familiarisation; 2. Generating initial codes; 3. Searching for themes; 4. Reviewing themes; 5. Defining and naming themes; and 6. Producing a report (Appendix 3). Codes were organised into themes according to the research aims. Themes identified that did not relate specifically to the aims were also collated and noted (Appendix 4). Themes relating to the features of the youth justice system that influence crime recidivism were summarised in a thematic map (Figure 6) with examples in Table 10.

RESULTS

Quantitative

The most common offences

Among 14-17 year old males, the frequency with which the 44 offence types were recorded are graphed in Figure 1. Four offence types occurred at least 250 times: malicious damage to property; assault (non-domestic violence); trespass; and break and enter dwelling.

Characteristics of the most common offences

Table 2 summarises the characteristics of offences and the characteristics of the person of interest for the four most commonly occurring offences. The grey shaded rows relate to all those aged 12-19 years with a residential postcode in Armidale. Of the 12,268 incidents associated with 12-19 year olds, 895 were malicious damage to property (7.3%), 867 were assault (non-domestic violence) (7.1%), 561 were trespass (4.6%) and 464 were break and enter dwelling (3.8%). Given these four most commonly reported offences represent 6% of the 67 unique incident types, this means these 6% of offence types account for a disproportionately high percentage of all offences (23%). Both the mean and median ages ranged from 15 to 16 years which falls within the BackTrack target age range (14-17 years), and the similarity between the mean and median demonstrates that the age range is normally distributed. Approximately 60% of all offences were associated with the BackTrack target age group of 14-17 years olds, although trespass was skewed towards younger ages (26% aged 12-13 years) and assault (non-domestic violence) was skewed towards older ages (29% aged 18-19 years).

The non-shaded rows (Table 2) relate to males aged 14-17 years in Armidale (the target population for BackTrack). Of the 4,948 offences associated with 14-17 year olds, 411 were malicious damage to property (8.3%), 277 were assault (non-domestic violence) (5.6%), 271 were trespass (5.5%) and 269 were break and enter dwelling (5.4%). As was the case for 12-19 year olds, these four offences (6% of all incident types) account for a disproportionately high percentage of all offences (25%). The proportion of offences where the POI was identified as Aboriginal ranged from 30% (trespass) to 72% (break and enter dwelling). The majority of offences occurred in residential homes or public places for break and enter dwelling (100%), malicious damage to property (61%) and assault (non-domestic violence) (67%), while the majority of trespass offences occurred in places of education (46%). Offences occurred relatively evenly across the week, although a higher proportion of offences tended to occur for all incident types on Saturdays (ranging from 17% to 28%), especially malicious damage to property (25%) and assault (non-domestic violence) (28%). Most offences occurred between midday and midnight: assault (non-domestic violence) (63.6%), trespass (67.5%), break and enter dwelling (62.4%) and malicious damage to property (62.3%). Nonetheless a considerable proportion of all offences occurred between midnight and 6am, except assault (non-domestic violence), which ranged from 22% to 29%.

Figure 1: Frequency of offences (by CATEGORY and subcategory*) where the POI has a residential postcode in Armidale, is male and aged 14-17 years.
*nb: Categories are identified in capital letters and sub-categories in lower-case letters

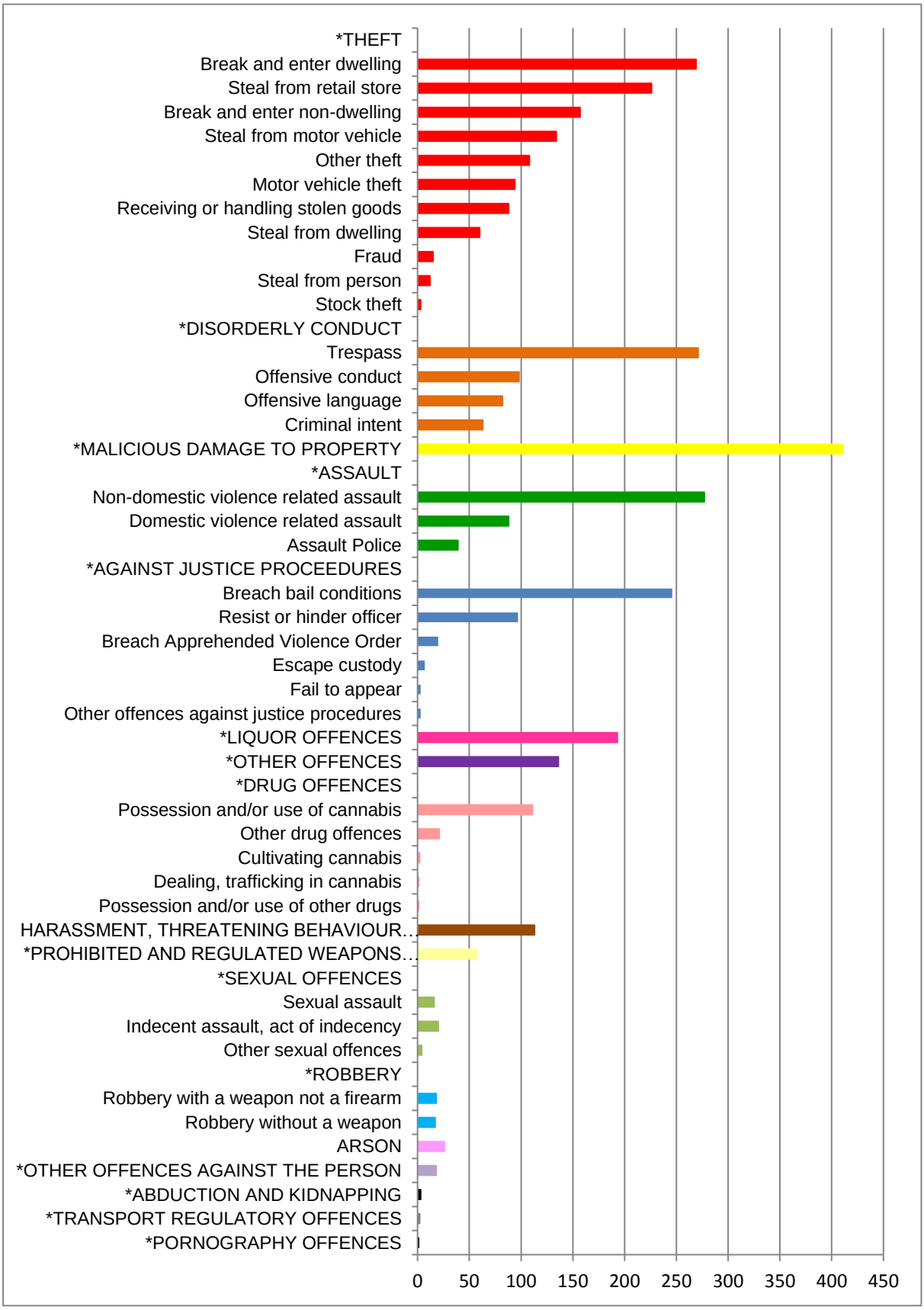


Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the most common crimes where the person of interest has a residential postcode in Armidale

Individual characteristics	Break and enter dwelling	Malicious damage to property	Assault (non-domestic violence)	Trespass
All young people aged 12-19 years[a]				
Number of offences	***n=464 (3.8%)***	***n=895 (7.3%)***	***n=867 (7.1%)***	***n=561 (4.6%)***
Age				
Mean (median) age	15.2 (15)	15.7 (16)	15.9 (16)	15.3 (15)
12-13 years	92 (19.8%)	171 (19.1%)	142 (16.4%)	148 (26.4%)
14-15 years	187 (40.3%)	242 (27%)	230 (26.5%)	137 (24.4%)
16-17 years	129 (27.8%)	275 (30.7%)	241 (27.8%)	189 (33.7%)
18-19 years	56 (12.1%)	207 (23.1%)	254 (29.3%)	87 (15.5%)
Gender				
Male	389 (83.8%)	723 (80.8%)	535(61.7%)	451 (80.4%)
Males aged 14-17 years only[b]				
Number of offences	***n=269 (5.4%)***	***n=411 (8.3%)***	***n=277 (5.6%)***	***n=271 (5.5%)***
Aboriginal status				
Aboriginal	194 (72.1%)	179 (43.6%)	131 (47.3%)	82 (30.3%)
Non-Aboriginal	57 (21.2%)	207 (50.4%)	132 (47.6%)	184 (67.9%)
Unknown	18 (6.7%)	25 (6.1%)	14 (5.1%)	5 (1.8%)
Location of incident[c]				
Business/commercial	0 (0.00%)	63 (15.3%)	24 (8.7%)	29 (10.7%)
Outdoor/public place	0 (0.00%)	74 (18%)	116 (41.8%)	4 (1.5%)
Residential	269 (100%)[b]	176 (42.8%)	69 (25%)	94 (34.7%)
Education	0 (0%)	44 (10.7%)	38 (13.7%)	125 (46.1%)
Other	0 (0%)	54 (13.1%)	30 (10.8%)	19 (7%)
Day of the offence				
Monday	45(16.7%)	51 (12.4%)	30 (10.8%)	25 (9.2%)
Tuesday	33 (12.3%)	47 (11.4%)	23 (8.3%)	30 (11.1%)
Wednesday	23 (8.6%)	53 (12.9%)	40 (14.4%)	39 (14.4%)
Thursday	49 (18.2%)	42 (10.2%)	30 (10.8%)	36 (13.3%)
Friday	40 (14.8%)	57 (13.8%)	43 (15.5%)	49 (18.1%)
Saturday	45 (16.7%)	101 (24.6%)	78 (28.2%)	50 (18.5%)
Sunday	34 (12.6%)	60 (14.6%)	33 (12%)	42 (15.5%)
Time of the offence				
12am-6am	37 (13.7%)	121 (29.4%)	70 (25.3%)	59 (21.8%)
6am-12pm	64 (23.8%)	34 (8.3%)	31 (11.2%)	29 (10.7%)
12pm-6pm	84 (31.2%)	147 (35.8%)	109 (39.4%)	77 (28.4%)
6pm-12am	84 (31.2%)	109 (26.5%)	67 (24.2%)	106 (39.1%)

[a]Total number of offences for 12-19 year olds is 12,268.

[b]Total number of offences for 14-17 year old males is 4,948.

[c]All break and enter dwelling offences occur in a residential location by definition.

BackTrack's association with reductions in offences

Break and enter dwelling

Figure 2 shows a relatively flat trend in break and enter dwellings after BackTrack commenced in Armidale in 2006, relative to an increasing trend before BackTrack (1999-2005). It also shows an apparent steep increase in break and enter dwellings in Tamworth after 2006, compared to the 1999-2005 period in Tamworth.

Figure 2: Break and enter-dwelling incidents in Armidale and Tamworth for 14-17 year old males

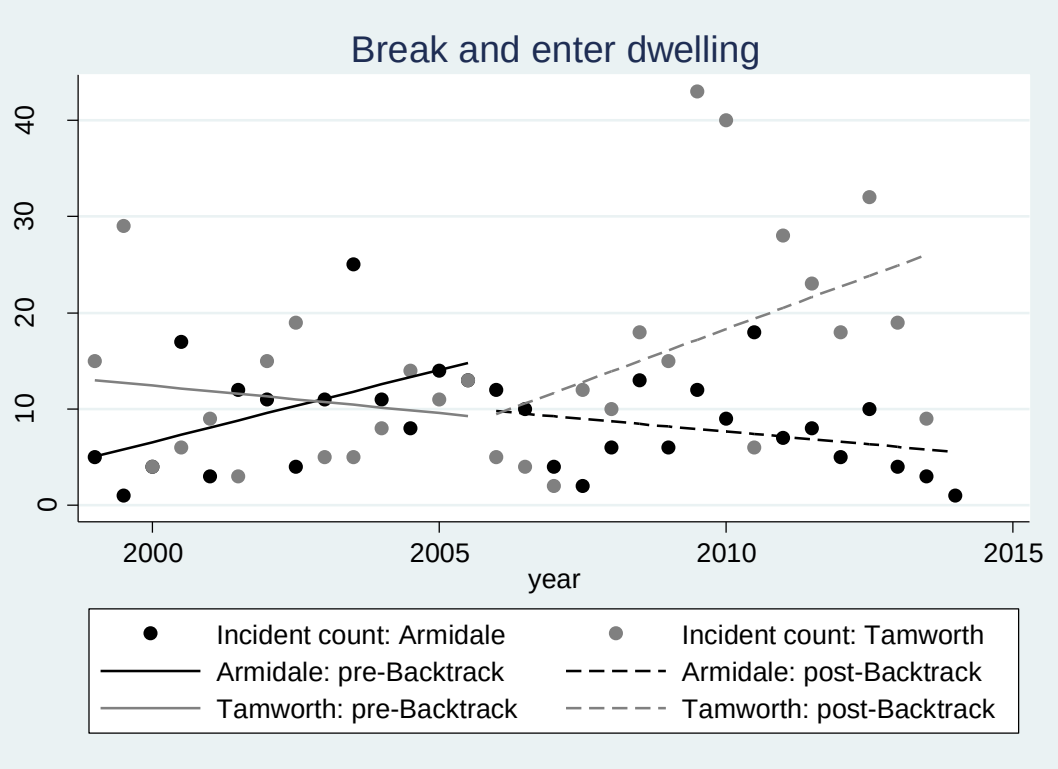


Table 3: Segmented regression models predicting 6 monthly rates of break and enter dwelling incidents for 14-17 year old males in Armidale and Tamworth

	Coefficient (estimate)	95% Confidence Interval		p-value
		Lower bound	*Upper bound*	
ARMIDALE				
Intercept	5.06	-0.26	10.37	0.06
Baseline Trend	1.50	0.11	2.89	0.04
Level Change	-4.77	-12.29	2.75	0.2
Trend Change	-2.03	-3.76	-0.29	0.02
TAMWORTH				
Intercept	13.00	2.56	23.44	0.02
Baseline Trend	-0.57	-3.30	2.16	0.7
Level Change	-0.91	-15.93	14.11	0.9
Trend Change	2.78	-0.75	6.30	0.1

Table 3 shows there was evidence of an increasing trend in break and enter dwelling offences in Armidale prior to BackTrack (1.50 offences per year, 95% CI: 0.11 to 2.89; P=0.04). There was a statistically significant reduction in offences following the introduction of BackTrack of 2.03 offences per year (95% CI: 0.29 to 3.76; P=0.02).

There was a weakly negative trend in break and enter dwelling offences in Tamworth prior to BackTrack (-0.57 offences per year, 95% CI: -3.03 to 2.89; P=0.7). While there was an increase in offences after 2006 (2.78 per year, 95% CI: -0.75 to 6.30), this increase was not statistically significant (P=0.1).

Malicious damage to property

Figure 3 shows a reduction in malicious damage to property after BackTrack commenced in Armidale in 2006 relative to an increasing trend before BackTrack. It also shows a steep increase in malicious damage to property in Tamworth both before and after 2006.

Figure 3: Malicious damage to property incidents in Armidale and Tamworth for 14-17 year old males

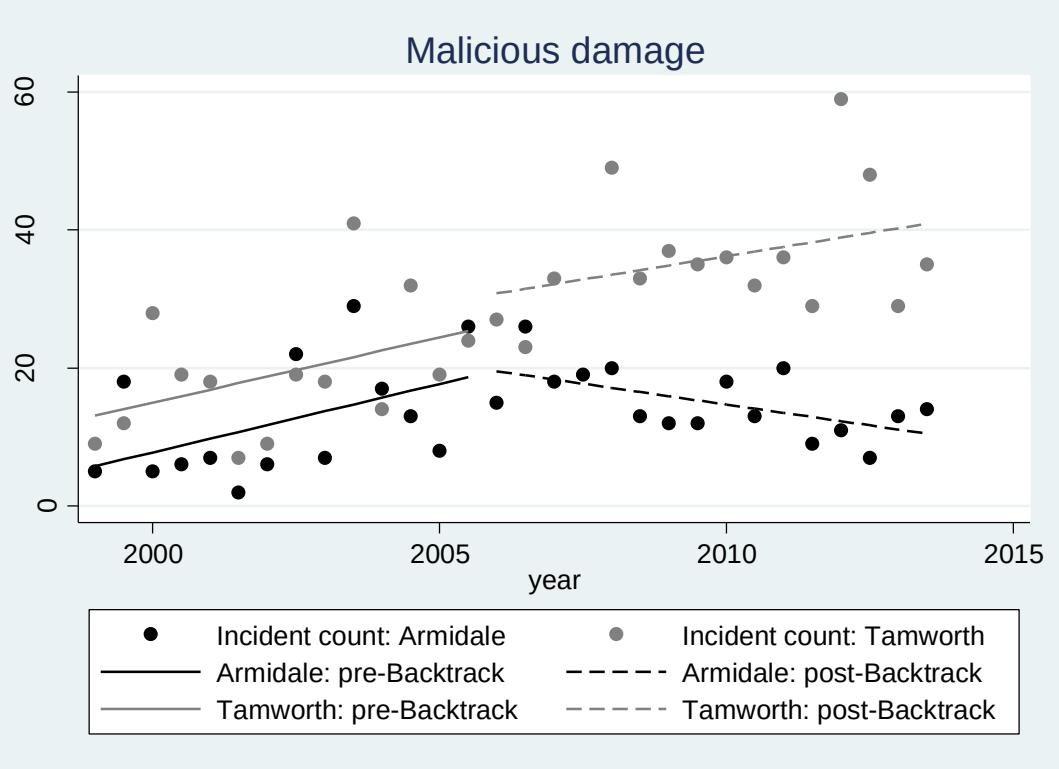


Table 4: Segmented regression models predicting 6 monthly rates of malicious damage incidents for 14-17 year old males in Armidale and Tamworth

	Coefficient (estimate)	95% Confidence Interval		p-value
		Lower bound	*Upper bound*	
ARMIDALE				
Intercept	5.75	-0.67	12.16	0.08
Baseline trend	1.99	0.31	3.67	**0.02**
Level change	1.44	-7.79	10.67	0.8
Trend change	-3.20	-5.36	-1.03	**0.005**
TAMWORTH				
Intercept	13.06	3.59	22.53	**0.009**
Baseline trend	1.89	-0.58	4.37	0.1
Level change	4.75	-9.32	18.81	0.5
Trend change	-0.54	-3.79	2.70	0.7

Table 4 shows there was evidence of an increasing trend in malicious damage to property offences in Armidale prior to BackTrack (2.00 offences per year, 95% CI: =0.31 to 3.67, P=0.02). There was a statistically significant reduction in offences following the introduction of BackTrack of 3.20 offences per year (95% CI: = -5.36 to -1.03, P=0.005).

In Tamworth, there was evidence of an increasing trend in malicious damage to property offences prior to BackTrack (1.89 offences per year, 95% CI: = -0.58 to 4.37, P=0.1). While there was a reduction in offences after 2006 (0.54 per year, 95% CI: -3.79 to 2.70), this reduction was not statistically significant (P=0.7).

Assault (non- domestic violence)

Figure 4 shows a decreasing trend in assault (non-domestic violence) after BackTrack commenced in Armidale in 2006, relative to an increasing trend before BackTrack. It also shows an increase in Tamworth before BackTrack, and a mildly increasing trend after BackTrack commenced in 2006.

Figure 4: Assault (non-domestic violence) incidents in Armidale and Tamworth for 14-17 year old males

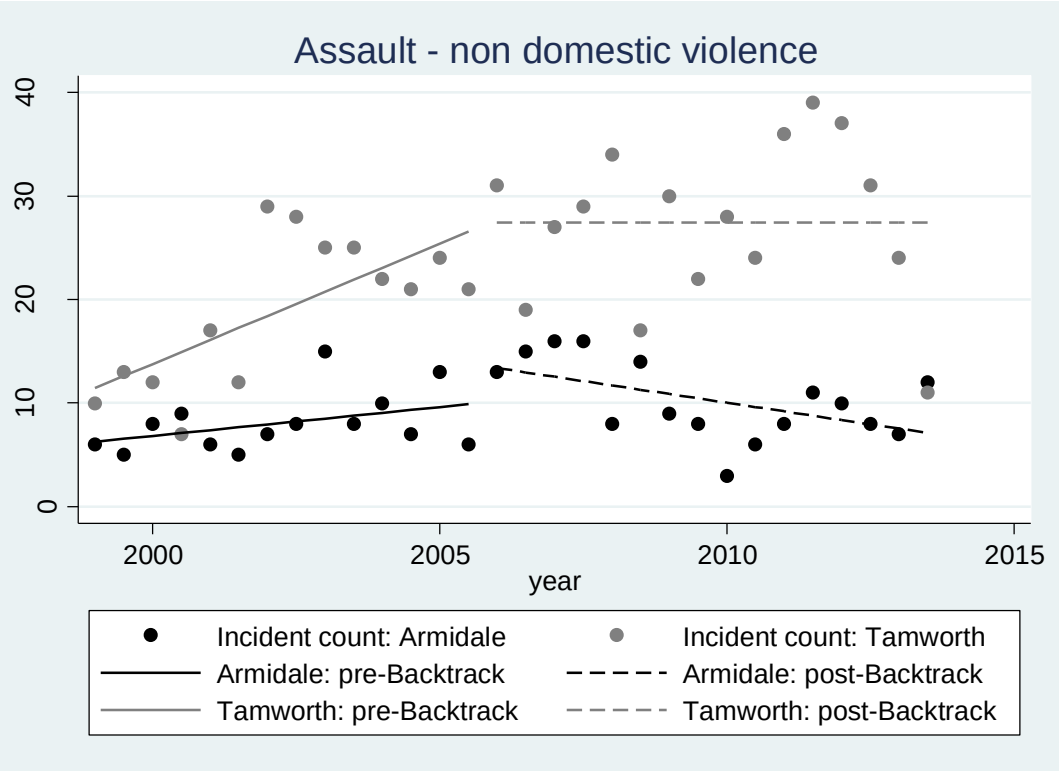


Table 5: Segmented regression models predicting 6 monthly rates of assault (non-domestic violence) incidents for 14-17 year old males in Armidale and Tamworth

	Coefficient (estimate)	95% Confidence Interval		p-value
		Lower bound	*Upper bound*	
ARMIDALE				
Intercept	6.26	3.02	9.50	0.001
Baseline trend	0.56	-0.29	1.40	0.2
Level change	3.91	-0.74	8.57	0.1
Trend change	-1.39	-2.49	-0.30	0.02
TAMWORTH				
Intercept	11.46	4.28	18.63	0.003
Baseline trend	2.32	0.44	4.20	0.02
Level change	0.91	-9.41	11.23	0.9
Trend change	-2.32	-4.75	0.10	0.06

Table 5 shows there was evidence of an increasing trend in assault (non-domestic violence) offences in Armidale prior to BackTrack (0.56 offences per year, 95% CI: = -0.29 to 1.40, P=0.2). There was a statistically significant reduction in offences following the introduction off BackTrack of 1.39 offences per (95% CI: = -2.49 to -0.30, P=0.02).

In Tamworth, there was evidence of an increasing trend in assault (non-domestic violence) offences prior to BackTrack (2.32 offences per year, 95% CI: = 0.44 to 4.20, P=0.02). While there was a reduction in offences after 2006 (2.32 per year, 95% CI: -4.75 to 0.10), this reduction was not statistically significant (P=0.06).

Trespass

Figure 5 shows a steep reduction trend in trespass after BackTrack commenced in Armidale in 2006, relative to an increasing trend before BackTrack. It also shows a steeper increase in trespass in Tamworth after 2006, compared to the increase in the 1999-2005 period.

Figure 5: Trespass incidents in Armidale and Tamworth for 14-17 year old males.

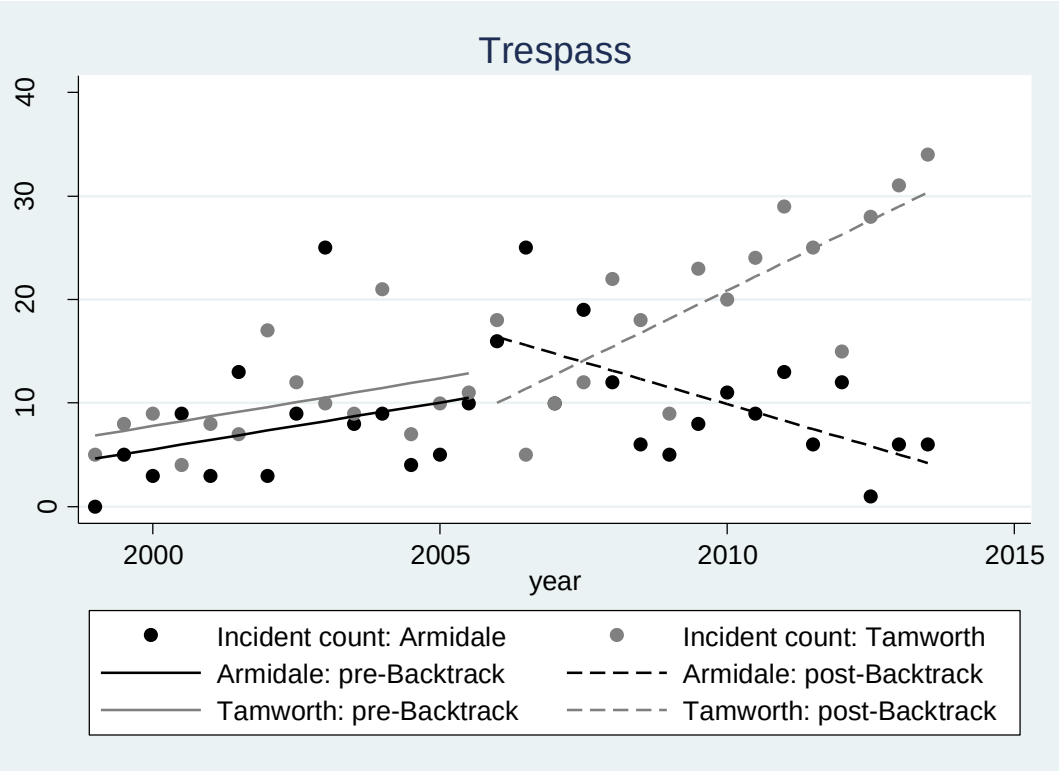


Table 6: Segmented regression models predicting 6 monthly rates of Trespass incidents for 14-17 year old males in Armidale and Tamworth.

	Coefficient (estimate)	95% Confidence Interval		p-value
		Lower bound	*Upper bound*	
ARMIDALE				
Intercept	4.63	-0.99	10.25	0.1
Baseline trend	0.91	-0.56	2.37	0.2
Level change	6.69	-1.39	14.77	0.1
Trend change	-2.53	-4.42	-0.63	0.01
TAMWORTH				
Intercept	6.86	1.65	12.07	0.01
Baseline trend	0.92	-0.44	2.29	0.2
Level change	-4.18	-11.68	3.32	0.3
Trend change	1.79	0.03	3.55	0.05

Table 6 shows there is evidence of a weakly positive trend in trespass offences in Armidale prior to BackTrack (0.92 offences per year, 95% CI: -0.56 to 2.37, P=0.2). There was a statistically significant reduction in offences following the introduction of Backtrack of 2.53 offences per year (95% CI: -4.42 to -0.63, P=0.01).

In Tamworth, there was evidence of an increasing trend in trespass offences prior to BackTrack (0.92 offences per year, 95% CI: -0.44 to 2.29, P=0.2), and a statistically significant increase in offences after 2006 (1.79 per year, 95% CI: 0.03 to 3.55, P=0.05).

Qualitative

Understanding of BackTrack

Key stakeholders tended to describe their understanding of BackTrack in terms of who it targets (i.e. disengaged, young people, males, lack of role models, high-risk of offending) and its aims (e.g. to reduce offending, to redirect, to support, to teach skills, increase employment opportunities and re-engage with the community), rather than being able to describe specific program components. For example:

> M: "… well, a program to take in, as far as I'm aware, kids who are before the court and to pair them with dogs or have them studying, or doing manual work … with the ultimate result to stop reoffending."
>
> YLO: "… I know its run by [BackTrack Manager] and he takes in disengaged young people from the education system…"
>
> CPO: "…my understanding of BackTrack is that [BackTrack Manager] works with kids in that age-group, basically trying to re-direct them and help them, get an education or develop some kind of skill to help them then get employment and be a productive member of the community…"

These extracts indicate that key stakeholders are aware of who BackTrack intends to target and its essential goals. The Magistrate seems more aware of the positive impact of BackTrack on crime incidents, whereas the police appear more likely to perceive that it is an intervention that primarily seeks to improve educational and employment outcomes. Together, these views suggest that although there is clear awareness of BackTrack, there is potential for enhanced knowledge about its specific components and benefits in reducing crime, not just improving educational and employment outcomes.

Perceptions of the most common incidents among young people

In response to being asked to identify the most common crime incidents among Backtrack participants, these three key stakeholders indicated that they were not always aware about whether young people were in BackTrack and, as a consequence, they spoke about young people in Armidale generally. After being presented with a list of crime type frequencies, Table 7 shows that all interviewees agreed with the most common crime types for young people, with the exception of assault (non-domestic violence) (Magistrate and YLO) and trespass (CPO).

Table 7: Key stakeholders views on the most common crimes among young people aged 14-17 years and living in Armidale.

	Magistrate (M)	Youth Liason Officer (YLO)	Crime Prevention Officer (CPO)
Break & Enter	Yes	Yes	Yes
Malicious Damage to Property	Yes	Yes	Yes
Assault (non-domestic violence)	No	No*	Yes
Trespass	Yes	Yes	No**

*'rare'
**'minor'

Perceptions of the impact of BackTrack on crime rates over time

Table 8 illustrates that there are various other factors that could influence rates of offences among young offenders. Participants not only talked about the most common crime types, but also other crimes, such as breach of bail and offensive language, in which recent changes in legislation were seen as likely to impact on the likelihood of offending. Increases in crime were considered by key stakeholders to be due to less diversion, increased recording of incidents, time of year (summer), particular families moving to town, formation of groups and greater opportunities to commit crime. Decreases were generally considered to be due to a combination of factors, rather than any one program such as BackTrack, including improved communication between police and program staff, the effectiveness of detention, time of year (winter), changes in policing and legislation (tougher consequences), and increased vigilance and awareness by community members.

Table 8: Key stakeholders' views on possible explanations for the crime trends in Armidale, including BackTrack

Broad theme	Theme	Example quotes
Increases in crime	Less choice in diversion (e.g.no drug court)	M: "…and you know the great pity is, that there was a drug court in Sydney and they just, literally overnight, withdrew funding from it…"
	Multiple offences in a week. Offending in groups.	YLO: "…we have spates of things happen…multiple ones in a week, like perfect example…halfway through last year 4 kids did 19 steal from motor vehicles in one night…"
	Weather (summer). Who's in town	YLO: "…absolutely so weather's got a lot to do with it too and also who's in town and also a group of kids get together and decide they're gonna do something…"
	New trends	M: "one thing I'm noticing a lot is the motels, breaking into either the offices…the manager's office and getting the keys and then breaking in or breaking in when people are asleep in their motel room…"
	Opportunistic	YLO: "…oh they just see opportunities you know the borders there [Private Boarding School] and the kids in general leave things out and it's easier to pick up something like a bike or a scooter or something on their way through…"
	Recording of data	YLO: "…but it could also be the recording of data…"
Decreases in crime	Combination of things. Communication (police and program staff)Prevention programs	CPO: "…could be BackTrack, could be a combination of all sorts of things…could be families moving in and out of town um, could be better sharing of information, so target hearting as well, it could be a whole range of things really…"
	Detention	M: I can't say whether it's because a group of offenders were actually still in custody…about to be released soon or not…"

Time of day-year (e.g. day, winter)	YLO: "…if you have a look at summer and winter, difference with summer we've got more offences, usually happening after dark compared to winter, it's too cold…"
Change in policing and legislation. Tougher consequences.	M: "…now bail's gonna be an interesting one, because we've just had a new bail Act come in… which has completely changed everything…" CPO: "…offensive language…you can see that plummet and this, I'd say this has got to do with the tickets that have come in, so there's quite decent fines for this kinda behavior now…"
Vigilance and awareness (new officers, targeting particular offenders, recording of data)	CPO: "…more people are being vigilant…because if you get the Community Safety Officer coming in and telling people to lock up and not leaving their handbags sitting at the front door or things like that, our biggest thing, young offenders are opportunistic…" M: "you never know, that could be explicable by someone who really had, you know had his or her eye on indigenous boys...on young people"

Participants were also asked to rate the effectiveness of BackTrack in influencing particular outcomes, as summarised in Table 9, using a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being very detrimental and 5 being very beneficial.

Table 9: Key stakeholders' ratings on the effectiveness of Backtrack (1: very detrimental; 5: very beneficial)

Effectiveness of BackTrack	Magistrate	Youth Liaison Officer	Crime Prevention Officer
Preventing involvement in criminal incidents	4	3	4
Helping manage legal affairs	5	DK*	4
Preventing recidivism	4	DK*	4
Reducing severity of crime	5	DK*	3

*Did not indicate rating.

The following extracts illustrate the reasons for participants' ratings in relation to these four key areas.

(i) Preventing involvement in criminal incidents

YLO: "…I'd say they're doing a good job, coz we have seen a few young people who have gone through that we were, were having bets that they would end up in the criminal justice system and …we've seen a lot of so- that still keep coming back our way, so I'm sort of in the middle, or on the fence on that one."

(ii) Helping manage legal affairs

CPO: "…I think [BT Manager] is really persistent with that…"

(iii) Preventing recidivism

CPO: "…well again, I think because he's re-directing them so he is, he is yeah, once you start re-directing them out of that one lifestyle into another, yeah it does, it helps prevent … yeah a 4 again, coz he's obviously you're not gonna have a 100% strike rate, coz it's to do with the participant as well, but he does a pretty good job…"

M: "…well see, I only see them if they're re-charged, I mean I do occasionally see, someone who's broken a bond because they've failed to, you know, do drug counselling or whatever, I don't see so much of that in kids court as I do in adults, I think they give them a lot more warnings and it'll be a long time before they'll actually get back to court, but… sorry, I can't give it a 5, just because I do see recidivism... I'd probably give that a 4 as well, yeah…"

YLO: "…yeah, yeah, see, I'd be sitting on the [fence], again we have seen a couple that have gone through and as I said have done really well. We don't know which ones are there coz I mean we know one kid in particular who's quite clear that he's at BackTrack, but he's, we pick him up, well probably in the last 5 nights we're had him 5 nights in a row, so that's not stopping recidivism whatsoever you know…and there's about two or three of them like that but we don't know about the others that have gone through, have they done really well or not reoffended and stuff like that…"

YLO: "…we only come across them if they're offenders…repeat offenders, as I said two kids in particular – 'we're at BackTracks' well 'when was the last time you were at BackTracks?', 'oh we didn't go this week'…or 'we didn't go last week' so yes they are in the BackTrack system, but and that's the ones we ring up and go 'what's going on? What are you doing about them? So yeah, yeah but others we have seen go through and we have come across them occasionally…they probably could have been worse offenders if they hadn't gone there but there's a big gap between…a couple down this end and a couple down that end, there's probably a really good group in the middle… that we have seen…"

(iv) Reducing severity of crime

M: "…I'd, I'd probably give that a 5, yeah…I can't recall a time where I've seen them back for a more serious charge…"

CPO: "maybe, that's a 3 that one, because I think that's, I think that's an individual thing as well, that's up to the kid, that's not necessarily something that [BT manager] can manipulate so well, so yeah probably a 3…"

YLO: "… right, yeah see it, it's hard for us to know, I know BackTracks is, it's great, and he's [BT Manager] chipping away at some of those really hard offenders that we probably would have come across, but I know a couple of hard offenders that we've had to deal with, has been constant for a while, and they've, they've hit 18, and picked up their game...look at the fact that, is it they don't want to go to adult jail so, is that been a deterrent or whether, has [BT manager] done something…yeah, and [BT manager] has been doing. Look, we've seen him chip away with some of these really hard-core offenders, but we only see a small amount of them… unfortunately we don't see the big picture of what he's doing, which makes it hard…"

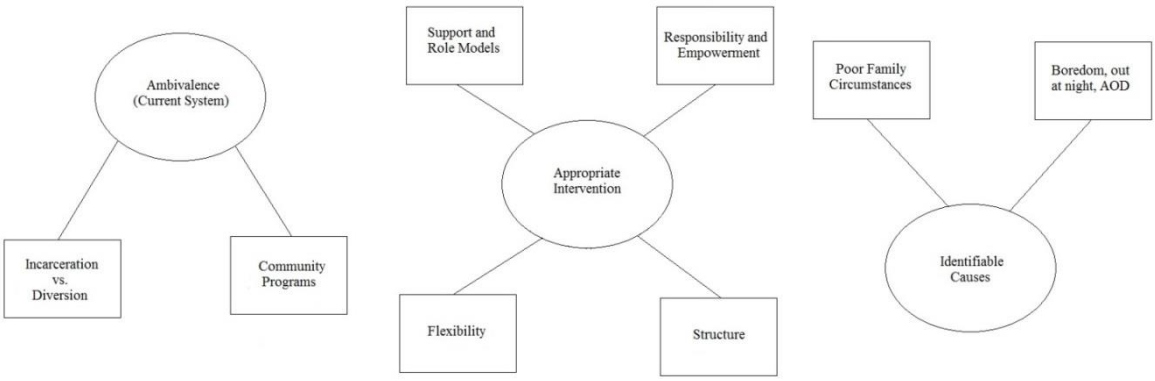
These comments indicate that the magistrate tended to view BackTrack as effective in most areas, especially in the management of legal affairs and in reducing the severity of crime. The CPO agreed to a slightly lesser extent, although was undecided about whether the severity of crimes had been reduced. The YLO presented some ambivalence about whether each of these areas had been

influenced by BackTrack. In particular, the YLO noted that the small number of repeat offenders are much more visible to police than the majority who may reduce or cease their criminal behaviour. She was also uncertain about how BackTrack might alter the trajectories of young people's involvement in crime in a way that differs from the natural history of offending, such as a tendency to reduce crime once they reach 18 years of age where the threat of incarceration in adult jails may be a strong deterrent.

Features of the youth justice system that influences crime recidivism

Finally, participants were asked: 'What is it about the justice system approach that is important in influencing the level of recidivism amongst this group of young people?' Responses were coded into themes to capture the dynamic and common perceptions among key stakeholders (Appendix 3). As shown in Figure 6, three key themes emerged: ambivalence about the current system; identifiable causes; and appropriate intervention.

Figure 6: Thematic map showing three main themes (circled) about the Features of the youth justice system that influence crime recidivism



These three themes are illustrated with example quotes in Table 10.

Table 10: Themes, subthemes and examples of responses to the question "What is it about the youth justice approach that influences re-offending?

Theme	Sub-Theme	Example quotes
Ambivalence (current system)	Incarceration vs. diversion	YLO: "…I can see where they're coming from because if you see young offenders who come out of detention centres, they can either go one way or the other, one way is that they pick up their game, they start to do the right thing or the other one they've learnt some really good tricks while they're down there…which they do, and they come out and they get better at doing it, therefore we don't catch them…" CPO: "…I think sometimes incarceration of young people is sometimes there's no other options, but sometimes it's not the best option either…"

	Community programs	CPO: "…I think it's really just having that intervention, rather than putting them on a bond and then sending them on their way and their still mixing with the same peer group and you know still not going to school…"
Identifiable causes	Boredom, out at night, Alcohol and other drugs	YLO: "…if they're never at home and parents can't control them and they're out at night and they're doing the wrong thing, they're on the drugs and alcohol or you know…"
	Poor family circumstances	CPO: "…I think that's why BackTrack is good for kids who don't have maybe the best family life or the most supportive parents etcetera…I think kids need that…especially if they don't got that really supportive parental role, father figure etcetera, it's hard for them…"
Appropriate intervention	Responsibility/empowerment	CPO: "…I think that the conferencing that they've brought in for young people is positive, it can be quite positive, rather than just incarcerating young people, and then having a program like BackTrack for them to then go onto or be involved in, I think it makes them take responsibility for some of the things that they've done and I think that at that age that's important if we want them to turn around and take a different path…"
	Support and role models	CPO: "I think he gives [BackTrack manager], support in that direction to try and you know them a different path…I think kids need that, particularly that age group, because it's a very impressionable age, especially for boys…"
	Structure	M: "…you can influence it by just you know being that structure or you know scaffolding in that and also, bringing them back to court if they break it and you know just keep being a you know strict sort of eye on everything…"
	Flexibility	M: "I mean I try and give them a chance, and I always say 'I'm giving you a big chance today' or if they and if they blow it I say 'you blew that one, I'll give you one more and then you're going to de-detention'… if I can forward them to a structured program like BackTrack, I certainly feel like there would be less recidivism…" "…are they still doing what they're told 9 months-12 months later, if not I bring them back, and you know, just see what's going, but of course kids do mess up and they will break bonds and we all know that, but that's why they're given so many other chances…" "…if they're engaged in BackTrack I do think that I give them a more lenient penalty…"

The themes summarised in Table 10 indicate that when asked to consider features of the youth justice system, participants were uncertain about whether the current system was effective and whether there might be a lack of alternatives between incarceration and community programs. Participants considered various factors that contributed to the cause of offending by young people (such as family circumstances, boredom, and alcohol and other drug use), which indicates knowledge in the field about the underlying causes of offending. Finally, participants considered possible features of a system or intervention that might work (appropriate intervention) to address these underlying causes, which included encouraging responsibility and empowerment, and providing support and role models, structure, and flexibility in the application of programs.

DISCUSSION

Summary of findings

This study shows that the majority of young people involved in offences in Armidale between 1999 and 2013 were between the ages of 14-17 years and were male. The most common types of crime among 14-17 year old males in Armidale were break and enter dwelling, malicious damage to property, assault (non-domestic violence) and trespass. The prevalence of these crime types was confirmed in interviews with key stakeholders, whose professional roles mean they have regular contact with high-risk young people, except for assault (non-domestic violence): neither the magistrate nor the YLO though this was a common offence type among young males in Armidale.

Given a minority of young males in Armidale are Aboriginal, they are substantially over-represented in all four of the most common incident types. Most offences occurred in either a residential location or an outdoor or public place, although trespass often occurred in an education facility. Incidents tended occur evenly throughout the week, except for a higher percentage on Saturdays. Most offences occurred in the afternoons and evenings.

There was a statistically significant reduction in the frequency of occurrence of the most commonly occurring offences in Armidale after the introduction of the BackTrack program. There were no statistically significant reductions in Tamworth where there was no BackTrack program, but there was a statistically significant increase in trespass from 2006 to 2013.

Key stakeholders identified BackTrack as potentially having a positive impact on crime recidivism. However, they also identified various other factors that may impact on crime recidivism, including a lack of policing and sentencing options, family circumstances, alcohol and other drug use, and boredom. The key stakeholders also seemed unclear about the benefits of BackTrack: they focused on the minority of repeat offenders who were highly visible to them, educational outcomes, and the natural attrition in crime as young people get older. This suggests there is a clear role for a partnership between community-based programs and researchers to identify and communicate the full range of benefits of programs like BackTrack. Finally, the key stakeholders identified intervention components that they perceive to be critical to the success of community programs, specifically the provision of support and role modelling, encouraging a sense of responsibility and empowerment in participants, providing structure, and ensuring the program is flexible enough to account for the chaotic lifestyles and changing needs of high-risk young people.

Interpretations of findings

The most common types of incidents and their characteristics

The finding that three of the four most common types of incidents were break and enter dwelling, malicious damage to property and trespass is consistent with existing evidence that young people tend to commit offences against 'property', such as graffiti, shoplifting or evading fares, rather than 'people', such as sex offences, assault or murder (Richards, 2011). The finding that assault (non-domestic violence) is also in the top four most common incidents is less consistent with this literature. One reason for the relatively high number of assault (non-domestic violence) might be that there is a high proportion of 'early peaking-moderate offenders' in Armidale, relative to 'late onset' or 'chronic offenders' (Richards, 2011: 2). Supporting this possibility is the over-representation of Aboriginal Australians, who are known to initiate involvement in crime at an earlier age (Cuneen, 2001; Cuneen, 2008). Another possible explanation might be reflected in the view of the YLO that crime among young people in Armidale tends to occur sporadically as groups of high-risk young people are formed. This view reflects existing research that has shown an estimated 40% of crimes among young people occur in groups which, in turn, increases the likelihood of young people engaging in violent crimes (Richards, 2011). Nevertheless, this study showed that 18-19 year olds account for the highest proportion of assault (non-domestic violence), which also reflects existing research findings that offending becomes more serious as young people get older (Richards, 2011), and it was not ranked as a common crime type by the magistrate or the YLO in Armidale.

Considering young people are more likely to engage in less serious crimes, one could question why less serious offences, such as disorderly conduct, against justice procedures, offensive language or offensive conduct (Cuneen, 2008), are not more common among 14-17 year old males in Armidale. One possibility is that local police are willing to provide more warnings or cautions to young people, rather than formally record an incident. Another possibility is that the BackTrack program has had an impact on these types of crimes so that they occur less frequently: Figure 1 represents the total number of incidents for different crime types from 1999-2013, so it is possible that incidents that are generally typical of young people have been reduced in Armidale since BackTrack began in 2006 which, in turn, has reduced the total number of these crime types among young people in Armidale over the time period 1999-2013. Although beyond the scope of this study, an analysis of all crime types over time in Armidale, compared to other regional communities such as Tamworth, would help establish the likely accuracy of this possibility.

Considering there is strong research indicating that young people, specifically males, are at increased risk of offending (Drabsch, 2006), it is unsurprising that males aged 14-17 years represented a majority of offences among those aged 12-19 years in Armidale. Males aged 14-17 years reflect the target group for BackTrack,, which suggests that the program is appropriately directed towards relevant high-risk young people. Aboriginal people are over-represented in the Armidale crime data, given they represent only approximately 8% of the population in Armidale (Biddle and Markham, 2011). This finding is consistent with previous research on the involvement of Aboriginal young people in crime (Richards, 2011) and their under-representation in diversion programs (Bargen, 2010).

Residential homes and public spaces, Saturdays, and afternoons and evenings, are all over-represented for crime incidents associated with 14-17 year old males in Armidale. Although the most commonly occurring crime types may be regarded as being among the less serious crime categories, this finding highlights that these crimes are highly visible and likely to be associated with high levels of social disturbance and frustration in the community generally. Other than the concentration of incidents on Saturdays, the most common four crimes were relatively evenly distributed across the week. This alludes to the reality that high-risk young people are not necessarily engaged in school and may, therefore, engage in offending behaviour at any time. This implies that it is important for

prevention programs to operate both during the week and on at least some weekends, and during the afternoons and evenings, to improve their effectiveness in reducing the risk of offending. This relatively even spread of incidents across days and times is consistent with comments made by the police that a large proportion of crimes involving young people are 'opportunistic' and that they are more likely to occur when 'vigilance' is absent (Table 8).

Is BackTrack associated with reductions in crime?

Results indicated that there were statistically significant reductions in the post-BackTrack period (2006-2013) for the four most common types of crime incidents in Armidale, that did not occur in Tamworth (no BackTrack intervention). This suggests that BackTrack may have contributed to the reduction in offences over time. Key stakeholders also acknowledged the potential for BackTrack to have had an impact noting its likely effectiveness (Table 9) and that it does include the features they perceived as important for an effective intervention (e.g. support, role models and empowerment, Table 10).

Presuming BackTrack did have an effect on the reduction of the most common offences in Armidale, its useful to explore whether these were of a direct nature (e.g. impacted participants behaviour directly) or an indirect in nature (e.g. influenced policing practices, leading to more lenience and diversion of BackTrack participants). Interestingly, the Magistrate suggested that it is likely that the police would provide many warnings before young people would reach the courts system. Furthermore, the Magistrate indicated she was more likely to provide a more lenient sentence if she knew a particular young person was a BackTrack participant (Table 10). However, the police noted that they were not necessarily aware if a young person was attending BackTrack, which suggests that they are likely to deal with young offenders in the same way regardless. Considering the data were police recorded incidents, it is likely that BackTrack did have more of a direct effect on crime rates among young people in Armidale, as opposed to the likelihood that police changed their reporting practices given they reported being unaware of which young people were BackTrack participants. The Magistrate's comment regarding lenience towards potential BackTrack participants is interesting because it may help broaden the current arguments about responses to young people involved in crime. For example, discussion of the CJS on one hand and community-based programs on the other, could develop into exploring how these two approaches might best complement each other in achieving more ideal outcomes for high-risk young people. Future research could explore this detail further.

It is interesting to note that the reductions in crime appeared to be immediate. This suggests that something about the program appears to have had an instantaneous impact on young people. For example, enrolment and involvement in the program may encourage young people to develop a more pro-social attitude, including a reformed identity that differs from their previous one which may have centred on antisocial behaviour and crime. Furthermore, perhaps participation in the program provides young people something to do (preventing them from being 'out and about'), provides them with support, structure and role models that they would otherwise not be able to access (Table 10).

Are there alternative explanations for the reductions in crime?

Although it is likely that BackTrack contributed to a reduction over time in the most common offences associated with young people, at least in part, it is unrealistic to expect that it would eliminate crime among young people. For example, BackTrack only targets 14-17 year old males, who only comprise about 60% of young people who are involved in offences (the others are 12-13 year olds and 18-19 year olds). The police alluded to this point when they highlighted ongoing issues that they face with a small number of repeat offenders: an appropriate goal of community-level prevention program would

be to achieve ongoing improvements in its target outcomes rather, than completely removing problems.

In addition to being realistic about the extent of likely benefits from programs like BackTrack, it is important to consider the various factors other than BackTrack that may have resulted in the observed reductions in crime over time. It is unlikely to be the result of a general trend across NSW. Although rates of property crime have been steadily falling across NSW, this trend did not occur in rural and regional communities such as Armidale and Tamworth (Weatherburn, and Holmes, 2013). Indeed, Tamworth showed increases in crime rates in the post-BackTrack period (2006-2013) for all four crime types (Figures 2-5). Interviews with key stake holders considered various other possible factors that could have contributed to the reduction of offences over time (Table 8). For example, they commented that changes in legislation (specifically the most recent bail, liquor and offensive conduct offences) had led to more rigorous consequences, such as higher fines and more stringent conditions, which is likely to influence (i.e. reduce the rate of offending), or at least make offenders 'think twice' about their behaviour. Changes in legislation is also likely to impact the level of vigilance carried out by police officers in their duties, which can possibly influence the number of offences recorded. Furthermore, stakeholders noted other more dynamic factors such as problematic families moving out of town, crime blitzes by police, and serious offenders being incarcerated. These explanations make sense given it is possible for most offences to be carried out by a small handful of young people on rare occasions (e.g. 'spates of things happen' - Table 8). Although these 'spates' are evident in the variation in the number of incidents reported every six months (Figures 2-5), they would not adequately explain the sustained and statistically significant reduction in Armidale in the post-BackTrack period.

Limitations

Arguably the main limitation is that these findings are limited to one town (Armidale), which raises two questions. First, to what extent are the observed changes due to BackTrack? Second, BackTrack generalisable to other towns? To answer those questions adequately, a more vigorous evaluation design is required, such as a randomised controlled trial or a multiple baseline design, that includes comparison communities. This study looked at Tamworth, but that only shows that where there was no program there was no effect. What is required is to show that the effects in Armidale can be replicated in other communities. It is also important to consider whether the program is cost-effective. Are these reductions enough to outweigh the cost of running the program? More research is required to provide a more tangible idea of BackTrack's cost-effectiveness. Another limitation is that this analysis only looked at crime data. Police incident data is useful to analyse patterns in crime over time, however, need not be the only form of data used to measure outcomes over time. BackTrack may also have impacted on a range of other outcomes that would need to be measured using other sources of data (such as self-report data and key stakeholders' observations of improvement). These could include mental health improvements, reduced alcohol and other drug use, reduced suicide risk and less contact with courts.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints of the present research project, interviews were only carried out with three key stakeholders in Armidale. However, interviewees were selected based on their relevant expertise and experienced professional roles in Armidale, which provided rich perspective and observational data for analysis. A major critique of qualitative analysis is the potential for researchers to apply an 'anything goes' approach to their thematic analysis (Antaki et al cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, this study provided a structured framework to the approach preventing the likelihood for too much flexibility and subjectivity in the analysis. Moreover, unexplained patterns in the quantitative analysis were complemented by the use of the qualitative data, which added richness and explanation to the findings.

Conclusion

Even though the four key crime types identified among 14-17 year old males in Armidale are less severe, they are common, easily observed in the community and have significant legal and educational implications. A community-based program aimed at reducing crime rates among high-risk young people appears to have significantly reduced the four most common types of crime. Based on the characteristics of these crimes, these types of programs are likely to be most effective if they engage with young people during the week, especially Saturdays, and in the afternoons and evenings. They also need to include high levels of support, flexibility, structure and empower young people to take responsibility for their behaviour. These programs can reduce harms, change life patterns and provide a benefit to the community through lower crime rates. It is important to examine the cost-effectiveness, benefits and impact of these programs in a larger number of communities in order to support their universal application.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview schedule: BT impact on crime and offending in Armidale

Format: semi-structured interviews
Time: 30 minutes with the Magistrate; maximum 45mins with the police

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Introduction/overview

Interview questions

How long have you worked in your current position, and in your profession?

Do you have a particular interest in certain groups of offenders (e.g young people, domestic violence, assaults etc)?

Can you tell us a briefly about your understanding of the BackTrack program?

In your role (as Magistrate/Police Office) are you usually aware whether a young person is attending BT, and if so, how do you know this?

****

We have used **police incident data from BOCSAR** to look at the types of crimes that young people have committed over the period 1999-2013.

M: Can you have a look at this list (page 1) and identify which ones are most likely to be being committed by BT participants who then attend court? What proportion would you estimate of the overall incidents end up in court? Has this changed over time? What would influence this?

YLO/CPO: Can you have a look at this list (page 1) and identify which ones are most likely to be being committed by BT participants? What proportion would you estimate would go on to attend court? Has this changed over time? What would influence this?

****

For each of these relatively common incidents that you have identified as being most relevant to BackTrack participants, I am now going to show you a graph of the trend in the frequency with which those incidents occurred in each year from 1999 to 2013. The vertical line in the middle of each graph indicates the point at which BackTrack commenced in Armidale (in 2006). I have also added two other lines: the number of incidents for those who are younger (aged 12 & 13) and older (aged 18 & 19) so you can compare the trend lines (the raw number of incidents will mostly be greater for 14-17 year olds because that covers 4 years rather than 2), so please focus on the trends, rather than the actual numbers.

As I show you each graph, could you briefly comment on why, or why not, BackTrack may have contributed to the apparent trend over time, taking into account a range of possible factors that could explain the trends other than BackTrack:

****

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the effectiveness of BackTrack in preventing involvement in criminal incidents
where 1 is very detrimental, 5 is very beneficial and 3 is neither detrimental or beneficial?

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the effectiveness of BackTrack to manage participants' legal affairs, such as attending their scheduled court appearances,
where 1 is very detrimental, 5 is very beneficial and 3 is neither detrimental or beneficial?

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the effectiveness of BackTrack in preventing recidivism,
where 1 is very detrimental, 5 is very beneficial and 3 is neither detrimental or beneficial?

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the effectiveness of BackTrack in reducing the severity of crimes committed by participants,
where 1 is very detrimental, 5 is very beneficial and 3 is neither detrimental or beneficial?

****

What is it about the justice system approach that is important in influencing the level of recidivism amongst this group of young people?

Conclusion

APPENDIX 2

Normality of residuals: a histogram and line plot to identify if the residuals were normally distributed.

Non-linearity: a scatter-plot of the observed values (i.e. the six-monthly time points) to ensure data were not curved).

Constance of variance: a normal probability plot of residuals and predictor variables checks for heteroscedasticity (i.e. if the variance was not constant).

Autocorrelation: to check for autocorrelation in the data (i.e. to check the reasonableness of the assumption that data points are independent of each other), data plotted by three monthly time points and the Durbin Watson statistic examined (values close to 2 indicate no autocorrelation).

Table 11: Tests of Assumptions for Armidale Analysis

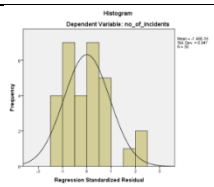
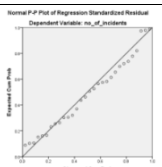
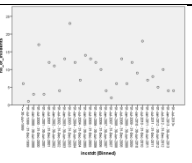
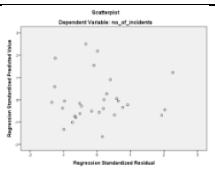
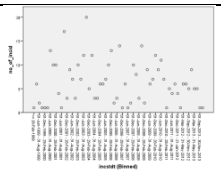
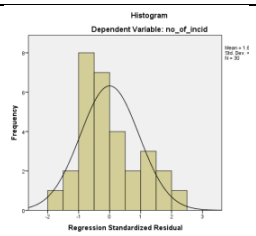
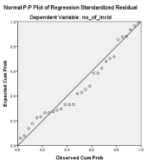
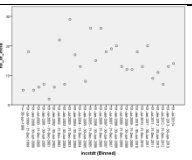
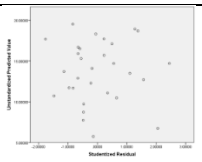
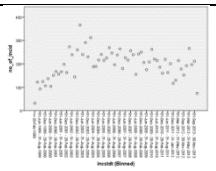
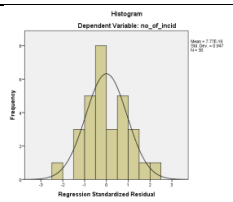
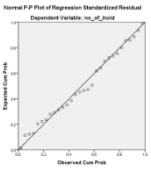
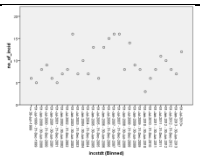
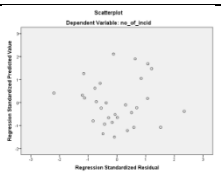
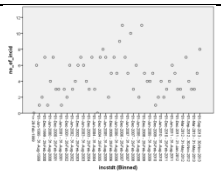
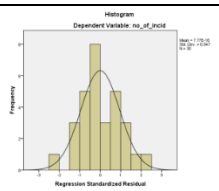
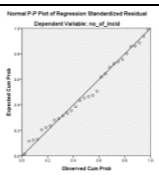
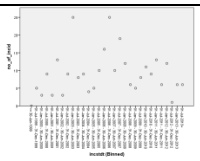
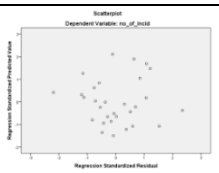
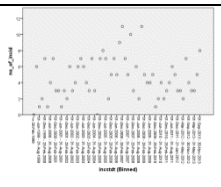
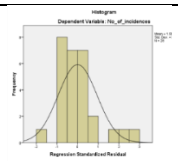
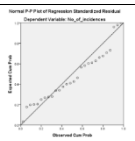
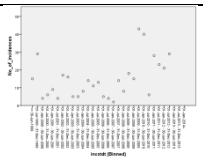
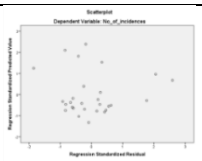
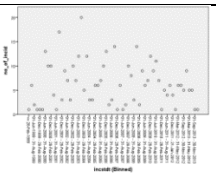
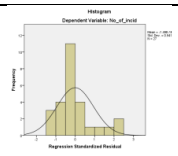
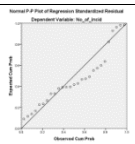
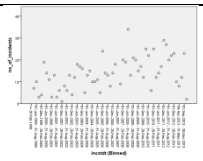
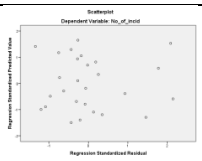
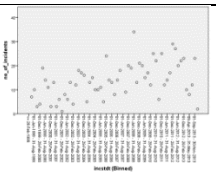
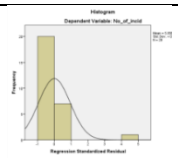
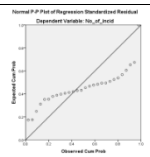
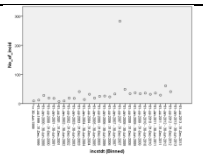
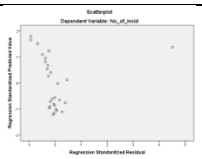
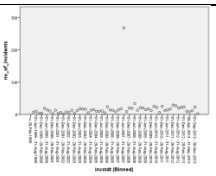
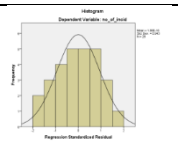
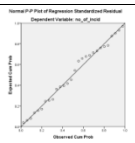
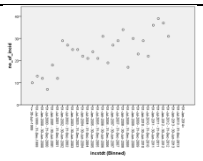
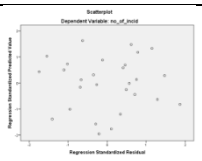
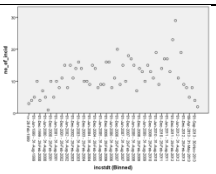
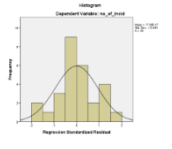
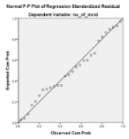
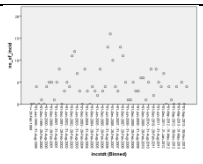
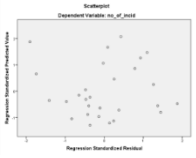
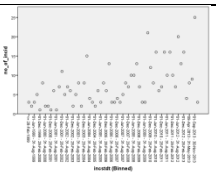
Offence Type	Normality		Non-Linearity	Heteroscedasticity	Autocorelation (i.e. seasonality)	Durbin-Watson statistic
	Histogram	Probability Plot				
Break and Enter						2.211
Malicious Damage						2.533
Non-Domestic Related Violence						1.861
Trespass						2.203

Table 12: Tests of Assumptions for Tamworth Analysis

Offence Type	Normality		Non-Linearity	Heteroscedasticity	Autocorelation (i.e. seasonality)	Durbin-Watson statistic
	Histogram	Probability Plot				
Break and Enter						1.981
Malicious Damage						2.373
Malicious Damage (sensitivity)						2.169
Non-Domestic Related Violence						2.166
Trespass						2.424

APPENDIX 3

Table 14: Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table extracted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

APPENDIX 4

Table 15: Coding Structure and Definitions

Themes	Sub-themes
(a) MOST COMMON CRIME TYPES	
Most common (magistrate)	▪ young people
Most common (police)	▪ young people
Uncommon (magistrate)	▪ young people
Uncommon (police)	▪ young people
Unsure (police)	▪ young people
Unsure (magistrate)	▪ young people
(b) 1. UNDERSTANDING OF BACKTRACK	
Targets	▪ Young people ▪ Young Males ▪ Disengaged ▪ Lack of role models ▪ High-risk of offending
Aims	▪ Reduce offending ▪ Redirect ▪ Support ▪ Teach skills ▪ Increase employment opportunities ▪ Re-engage with the community
(b) 2. IMPACT OF BACKTRACK	
Increases in Crime	▪ Less choice in diversion (e.g.no drug court) ▪ Multiple offences in a week. ▪ Offending in groups. ▪ Weather (summer). ▪ Who's in town ▪ New trends ▪ Opportunistic ▪ Recording of data
Decreases in Crime	▪ Combination of things ▪ Communication (Police and Program staff) ▪ Prevention ▪ Detention ▪ Time of day-year (e.g. day, winter) ▪ Change in policing and legislation (tougher consequences) ▪ Vigilance and awareness (new officers, targeting particular offenders, recording of data)
(b) 3. EFFECTIVENESS OF BACKTRACK	▪ Helping manage legal affairs. ▪ Preventing recidivism. ▪ Reducing severity of crime. ▪ Preventing involvement in criminal incidents.

(c) YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM APPROACH	
Ambivalence (Current System)	▪ Incarceration vs. diversion ▪ Community Programs
Identifiable causes	▪ Poor family circumstances ▪ Boredom, out late at night, AOD
Appropriate Intervention	▪ Responsibility and Empowerment ▪ Support and Role Models ▪ Structure ▪ Flexibility
OTHER	
(c) 2. YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM APPROACH	
(a) Entire Dataset (Legal perspective)	
Punishment - harsh	▪ Increased vigilance. ▪ New Legislation (consequences, increased fines). ▪ Repeat offenders (categorical offenders)
Welfare - lenient	▪ Diversion. ▪ Prevention. ▪ Rehabilitation.
Integration of Community, Police and Courts	▪ Communication (BT, Police and the Courts). ▪ Knowledge and Awareness of BT - and community prevention programs. ▪ Working together to create a supportive structure for young people.
Causes/Characteristics of crime	
Demographic	▪ Age: 12-19 ▪ Gender - Males ▪ Aboriginal Status
Family	▪ Family Circumstances. ▪ Poor role models. ▪ Exposure to criminal behaviour of siblings or relatives.
Antisocial Peer Influence	▪ Offending in groups
AOD	▪ Parents ▪ Young people
Environmental	▪ Disengaged from community ▪ Disengaged from school ▪ Disengaged young people.
Individual factors	▪ Developmental. ▪ Out late at night. ▪ Opportunistic. ▪ Mistakes. ▪ Categorical repeat offenders.

APPENDIX 5

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA

une
University of New England

KEY STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION STATEMENT & CONSENT FORM

Ethics Approval No: **HC13055**
KEY STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION STATEMENT & CONSENT FORM
Evaluation of the BackTrack program

Dear participant,

You are invited to participate in a study that is evaluating the BackTrack program that seeks to assist high-risk young people. You have been selected because you have been identified as a key stakeholder (ie: a community member with first-hand knowledge of the BackTrack program).

This form will give you information about the study and what being a part of it would mean for you. The study is being run by researchers from the University of New South Wales, the University of New England and James Cook University, and has the following aims:

1. To use routinely collected data to identify the crime characteristics of young people;
2. To identify whether a community based intervention program (BackTrack) is associated with reductions in frequency, or changes in types, of crimes committed by young people.
3. To obtain the views of key stakeholders (e.g. police, magistrates, school staff and other key stakeholders) on whether BackTrack has been successful in helping young people in their community.

If you decide to participate in this study you will be asked to respond to a number of questions, either in a focus group format or in a one-to-one interview. The questions will give you the opportunity to discuss your views about whether you think the BackTrack program has had an impact on high-risk young people in your community, especially in relation to your own field of work (e.g. impact on police interactions, impact on court appearances, impact on school attendance, etc.). A person from the research team will conduct the focus group. The researcher will NOT record any information that identifies you as an individual (name, age etc.). All focus groups will be held at a location to be advised, but it will occur in your community at a time and place that is agreeable to you. With your permission, we would like to audio-record the focus group,

as we have found that it is difficult to listen and write down all the information you tell us at the same time. Only the research team will listen to the recordings. The audio-recordings will be transcribed but there will be no information on the transcriptions that might enable you to be identified. These transcriptions and recordings will be stored on a password protected computer and destroyed after 7 years, in accordance with the ethical requirements for research. The focus group or interview will take no longer than 45 minutes.

Any information about you obtained in this study will remain confidential and will be used only with your permission or except as required by law. If you give us your permission by signing this consent form, we will use the information you provide to explore whether community views reflect data analysis results in relation to crime incident data. This may also aid in the reviewing the effectiveness of the BackTrack program, and to assist with the future direction of the program. We may also publish and present the results at relevant conferences and in refereed journals. In any publication, information will be presented in such a way that you will not be able to be identified.

Please be aware that you can say yes about being part of the study or you can say no, it is your choice. You can say yes and change your mind later. That is okay. You can choose to tell us some things and not other things. You can choose not to answer some questions.

Complaints about this study may be directed to the Ethics Secretariat, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, 2052 AUSTRALIA (phone 9385 4234, fax 9385 6648, email: ethics.sec@unsw.edu.au) or the Chairperson of the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) Ethics Committee (mail: P.O. Box 1565, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012; phone: 02 9212 4777, email: ahmrc@ahmrc.org.au).

Any complaint you make will be investigated promptly and you will be informed of the outcomes. Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with The University of New South Wales, the University of New England or James Cook University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. There is no guarantee of benefits by participating in this study.

If you have any questions, please contact Associate Professor Anthony Shakeshaft (E: a.shakeshaft@unsw.edu.au P: (02) 9385 0333) and he will be happy to answer them. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Kind regards,

Anthony Shakeshaft
Deputy Director, NDARC, UNSW
Email: a.shakeshaft @unsw.edu.au Phone: 02 9385 0423

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

KEY STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION STATEMENT (continued)

Evaluation of the BackTrack program

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that, having read the Participant Information Statement, you have decided to take part in this study.

Signature of Research Participant

Signature of Investigator

KAREN STAFFORD

Please PRINT Name

MEGAN SEMCZUK

Please PRINT Name

18. 8. 14

Date

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

KEY STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION STATEMENT (continued)

Evaluation of the BackTrack program

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that, having read the Participant Information Statement, you have decided to take part in this study.

Signature of Research Participant

Signature of Investigator

F McLennan

Please PRINT Name

MEGAN SEMCZUK

Please PRINT Name

18/8/14.

Date

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

KEY STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION STATEMENT (continued)

Evaluation of the BackTrack program

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that, having read the Participant Information Statement, you have decided to take part in this study.

.....	.....
Signature of Research Participant	Signature of Investigator
.....	.....
Please PRINT Name	Please PRINT Name
.....	
Date	