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Media Release

Australians believe crime is worse than it really is

The majority of Australians think crime is increasing and becoming more widespread but have confidence in the ability of police to combat crime, according to a report released today by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC).

What Australians think about crime and justice: results from the 2007 Survey of Social Attitudes reveals misconceptions of crime and the severity of sentencing.

AIC General Manager, Research, Dr Judy Putt, said the report found people actually perceived crime to be increasing when it wasn’t, that they overestimated the proportion of crime that involves violence and underestimated the proportion of people who are charged, convicted and imprisoned.

“From 2005 to 2007 there has been a downward trend in crime, however the majority of respondents (65%) believed crime had been on the increase,” Dr Putt said.

“The rates of crimes reported to police in four major categories, homicide, unlawful entry, motor vehicle theft and other theft had decreased, while public perception was that crime in general, was increasing.”

Dr Putt said recorded violent crime rates were increasing but the public believes violence or the threat of violence to be more widespread than it really is.

“However, the majority of Australians are not very worried about being a victim of crime and expressed confidence in police to solve crime (74%), respond quickly to crime (54%) and act fairly (74%).

“They were supportive of increased expenditure in areas of police and law enforcement by the government (67%) but had little confidence in the ability of the prison system to rehabilitate prisoners (88%) and to deter future offending (85%).”

The report showed the media was the main source of the public’s information about crime and justice.

The report also explores concerns about areas of crime such as credit card and identity fraud, which emerged as a new worry for Australians; and the continuing threat of terrorism.

For more information or to view the report visit www.aic.gov.au;

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