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Abstract | Using national data on the criminal histories of 5,669 known outlaw motorcycle gang (OMCG) members from 39 gangs, this paper explores the prevalence of violent and organised crime offending among Australian OMCGs.

Violent and profit-motivated offending was common among OMCG members. One in four had been apprehended for a recent offence involving violence and intimidation, and one in eight for organised crime-type offences. Offending and associated harm was concentrated among a relatively small group of members.

Half of all chapters and three-quarters of gangs had members recently involved in organised crime-type offending. In 11 gangs, both office bearers and other members were involved in organised crime, indicative of their status as criminal organisations. These gangs were also among those with the highest prevalence of violence and intimidation offences.

Australian outlaw motorcycle gang involvement in violent and organised crime

Anthony Morgan, Christopher Dowling and Isabella Voce

Outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs) occupy a prominent place in Australia's organised crime landscape. They have been identified by law enforcement as having high levels of involvement in methamphetamine production and distribution, illicit firearms trafficking, tax evasion and money laundering, as well as serious violent crime (Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission 2017, 2015; Sibson 2017).

While there is general acceptance that OMCG members offend more frequently and seriously than non-members (Blokland et al. 2019; Klement 2016; Morgan, Brown & Fuller 2018), the extent of their criminal offending—particularly their involvement in serious and organised crime—remains the subject of some debate (Barker 2015; Goldsworthy & McGillivray 2017; Lauchs & Staines 2019). This paper examines offending by OMCG members, chapters and gangs, with a focus on violent and organised crime-type offending, using criminal history data for a large sample of Australian OMCG members known to law enforcement.



Serious & Organised Crime
Research Laboratory

Criminal offending by outlaw motorcycle gangs

OMCGs originated in the United States in the 1940s and quickly embraced the identity of ‘one percenter’ motorcycle clubs, which were not registered with a mainstream motorcycle association and which operated as ‘outlaws’ outside of the law and societal norms (Barker 2017). They spread quickly into other regions, including Canada, Europe and Australia (Bain & Lauchs 2017). Their growth in numbers has been accompanied by growing concern about their involvement in criminal activity, leading many to conclude that crime is endemic among OMCGs (Bain & Lauchs 2017). Indeed, an ‘outlaw motorcycle gang’ has come to be most simply defined as a motorcycle club used by members to engage in criminal offending (US Department of Justice 2014). This includes violent crimes designed to protect the club and its reputation, its members and its territory, and more profit-motivated crimes that enhance the gang’s power or economic resources (Quinn & Koch 2003; US Department of Justice 2015).

Despite this, there has been limited empirical research into criminal offending by OMCG members compared with, for example, street gangs (Pyrooz et al. 2016). This is largely because of the challenges associated with accessing administrative data on OMCG membership in recorded crime samples, and the difficulties of using methods such as surveys, as have been used in studies of youth gangs, given that members are unwilling to speak to outsiders (Blokland et al. 2019; Silverstone & Crane 2017).

Studies that have used the criminal histories of relatively large samples of OMCG members have found the majority of members have an official history of recorded offending. An early Canadian study of 62 gangs in Quebec found that 70 percent of members had a criminal record, and 42 percent had been in prison (Tremblay et al. 1989). Klement (2016) found that 92 percent of Danish OMCG members had a criminal record. Blokland et al. (2019) reported that 82 percent of OMCG members in the Netherlands had been convicted at least once since the age of 18—58 percent for violence and 30 percent for drug offences—while 36 percent had been in prison. Recent studies comparing OMCG members with non-members have shown that OMCGs recruit individuals with a greater propensity for crime, particularly violent crime, and that joining a gang leads to further offending, including profit-motivated offending (Blokland et al. 2019; Klement 2016; Pederson 2018). Morgan, Brown and Fuller (2018) found the average total lifetime cost to the taxpayer of offending by OMCG members, based on both crime and prison costs, was \$1.3m.

A smaller number of studies have examined patterns of offending by groups, rather than by individuals, and attempted to assess the extent to which OMCGs are involved in organised crime. These studies have tended to rely on open source data, including media reports and court transcripts, and case studies of notorious individuals and events. For example, Barker and Human (2009) examined the crimes of the Hells Angels, Outlaws, Bandidos and Pagans motorcycle gangs based on a search of newspaper articles, finding a high degree of involvement in ongoing criminal enterprises, including the supply of drugs and weapons, as well as both planned and spontaneous acts of violence towards other gang members.

Three recent Australian studies have examined OMCG involvement in organised crime in Queensland. Lauchs (2018) analysed data on the Finks motorcycle club presented in a Queensland Police Service application to the Supreme Court, concluding there was limited evidence of radical or profit-motivated criminal activity (eg serious drug offences or money laundering). Lauchs and Staines (2019) conducted further analysis of the Supreme Court application, along with Supreme Court judgements and media reports relating to offences committed by 112 OMCG members. They found that, while OMCG members committed serious offences, there were relatively few examples of organised crime or of gang leaders being involved in criminal activity. Both studies concluded that OMCGs were not acting as criminal organisations.

Goldsworthy and McGillivray (2017) compared the number of proven charges for Queensland OMCGs with total reported offences for different crime types, concluding that OMCGs accounted for less than one percent of all crime. Although they acknowledged the involvement of OMCGs in methamphetamine distribution, they argued claims about OMCG involvement in organised crime had been overstated. However, this study relied on aggregate data, did not examine rates of offending among OMCG members or groups, and likely underestimated OMCG involvement in crime by comparing convictions with overall recorded offences.

The reliance on small, non-representative samples has left several unanswered questions regarding OMCG involvement in organised crime. It remains unclear whether OMCGs comprise individuals involved in organised criminal activity, whether there are cliques within gangs and chapters who collaborate to commit crime, or whether they are in fact criminal organisations (Barker 2017; Blokland, Soudijn & van der Leest 2017; Lauchs & Staines 2019; von Lampe 2019).

Aim and method

Research questions

Building on this prior research, this paper aims to address the following research questions:

- How prevalent is offending by OMCG members and chapters?
- How concentrated is offending and associated harms among OMCG members and chapters?
- To what extent can Australian OMCGs be characterised as criminal organisations?

Sample

To address these research questions, the criminal histories of 5,669 individuals identified by law enforcement as being affiliated with an OMCG were analysed. This sample was created by matching records from two Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission databases: the National Gangs List (NGL) and the National Police Reference System (NPRS). The NGL is a secure, validated list of OMCG members. State and territory police contribute to the NGL, while the Australian Gangs Intelligence Coordination Centre manages the database. Motorcycle clubs are classified as an OMCG and included on the NGL if they meet criteria developed by the Gangs Intelligence Coordination Centre in partnership with Commonwealth and state and territory law enforcement. An OMCG is a motorcycle club whose members use the club to engage in criminal offending, while an OMCG member is a person who identifies themselves as belonging to the OMCG and is treated by other gang members as such. This is verified using law enforcement intelligence based on agreed indicators of gang membership.

The NPRS database holds current and detailed national police information designed to assist operational police throughout Australia in dealing with and responding to persons of interest, including the offence history of individuals who have been arrested by police. Individuals on the NGL were matched with criminal history records on the NPRS by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's Advanced Analytics team using name, date of birth and residential address. This initial sample was then de-identified before being transferred to the Serious and Organised Crime Research Laboratory.

When the data were extracted, there were 39 OMCGs and 475 chapters (regional branches). The NGL includes office bearers, other patched members and prospects. Patched members are those with full voting rights and the right to wear full colours. Office bearers include members in executive roles, including chapter presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, treasurers and sergeants-at-arms. Prospects include nominees or probationary members who do not have full membership or the right to wear full colours but who are still affiliated with the gang. Of the 5,669 individuals on the NGL, 951 (17%) were prospects and 4,718 (83%) were patched members, of whom 12 percent ($n=555$) were listed as office bearers. This paper uses the term 'members' to describe both patched members (office bearers and others) and prospects. Prospects are included in the analysis of OMCG involvement in crime because their offending—particularly their recent offending—is likely to be related to their affiliation with the gang. Associates or supporters were not included in the data collection. All of the OMCG members on the NGL, including patched members and prospects, were male.

Four members were excluded from the analysis of offending due to apparent duplicated or erroneous criminal history matches. Of those remaining, 84 percent had a recorded criminal history, and more than 121,000 offences were linked to these individuals. Minor traffic offences (eg speeding and parking offences) were excluded because these offences are not uniformly uploaded to the NPRS by all jurisdictions.

Analysis

Offences were classified according to the typology developed by Quinn and Koch (2003), which categorises offences based on the type of activity, motivation for offending, and the degree of planning involved. The following offence categories were used:

- *any offence* resulting in an apprehension (excluding minor traffic offences);
- *violence and intimidation*, including homicide, assault, kidnapping and threatening behaviour;
- *drug supply*, including importation, manufacturing and dealing;
- *ongoing criminal enterprise*, including the commercial supply of drugs and firearms, serious fraudulent activity and serious regulatory offences; and
- *short-term instrumental offences*, including robbery, burglary, theft, minor fraud and non-commercial drug dealing.

Importantly, our measure of violence and intimidation does not distinguish between different types or targets of violence. It includes intra-gang violence (eg violence targeting a member leaving in bad standing), inter-gang violence (eg a brawl between competing gangs), and other forms of violence directed towards non-gang members, such as family and domestic violence.

A focus of this paper is OMCG involvement in organised crime. Ongoing criminal enterprise is used as a proxy for organised crime-type offending, as it best reflects the range of offences that meet the definition of serious and organised crime used in the *Australian Crime Commission Act 2002* (Cth): offences requiring a high degree of planning, organisation and sophistication. Although the presence of co-offending (ie offences involving two or more offenders) could not be established using these data, which is a limitation of the measure of organised crime involvement used in this study, these offences represent the types of crimes that are typically committed in concert with other individuals.

Limitations

The final sample was limited to individuals who had been identified by law enforcement as being affiliated with an OMCG and added to the NGL. While the significant investment by law enforcement in the proactive policing of OMCG members increases the likelihood of identification, it is likely that some members may not be included on the NGL, or that membership status is not current. It is also a point-in-time estimate (as at May 2019) of gang affiliation—those individuals who have left an OMCG were removed from the database and are not included in the analysis that follows.

Offences listed on the NPRS are not limited to crimes for which a person has been convicted. Rather, the system contains information on offences for which they have been apprehended by police. Similarly, not all offences will have been detected or reported to police, largely because of the characteristic secrecy and loyalty of gang members. Likewise, certain offences are likely to be over-represented in the criminal history of OMCG members because of targeted law enforcement activity and policing at public events such as national runs. The picture of criminal activity presented in this paper therefore reflects the range of offences for which OMCG members have been apprehended. The focus on selected categories of more serious offence types aims to help distinguish between those offences which are more likely to be detected through routine and proactive law enforcement against OMCGs, and those which are more likely to be reported to law enforcement or identified through an investigation.

Results

Gang and chapter size

The size of gangs and chapters varied considerably (Figure 1). At the point of data extraction, one quarter of gangs had 25 or fewer members, while one in three had more than 100 (mean=145.4, standard deviation (SD)=253.7). There was an average of 12.2 chapters per gang (SD=21.9). A small number of gangs ($n=5$, 13%) had only one chapter, 44 percent had between two and five chapters, 23 percent had between six and 15 chapters, and 21 percent had more than 15 chapters. Chapter size also varied, with the largest proportion (37%) having five or fewer members known to law enforcement, two in five (42%) more than 10 members, and one in 10 more than 25 members (mean=11.7, SD=12.0).

Gangs also varied in their reach, based on the presence of chapters in multiple states and territories. More than half of all gangs (54%) had a chapter established in more than one jurisdiction. Fifteen percent had chapters in two jurisdictions, 15 percent in three jurisdictions, and nearly one in four (23%) had a chapter established in four or more jurisdictions.

Figure 1: Number of members per gang, members per chapter and chapters per gang (%)



Note: Chapters exclude national executive or chapters with no jurisdictional assignment

Source: OMCG criminal history database 2019 [computer file]

The age profile of gangs varied: while some gangs had a relatively young profile, others were significantly older. The average age of members ranged from 33 years to 58 years. Many of the larger gangs (with more than 100 members) had younger members. In many gangs with younger members, a greater proportion were prospects. The average age of prospects (mean=36.5, SD=10.4) was nine years younger than that of non-office bearers (mean=45.6, SD=12.2) and 10 years younger than that of office bearers (mean=46.4, SD=12.3).

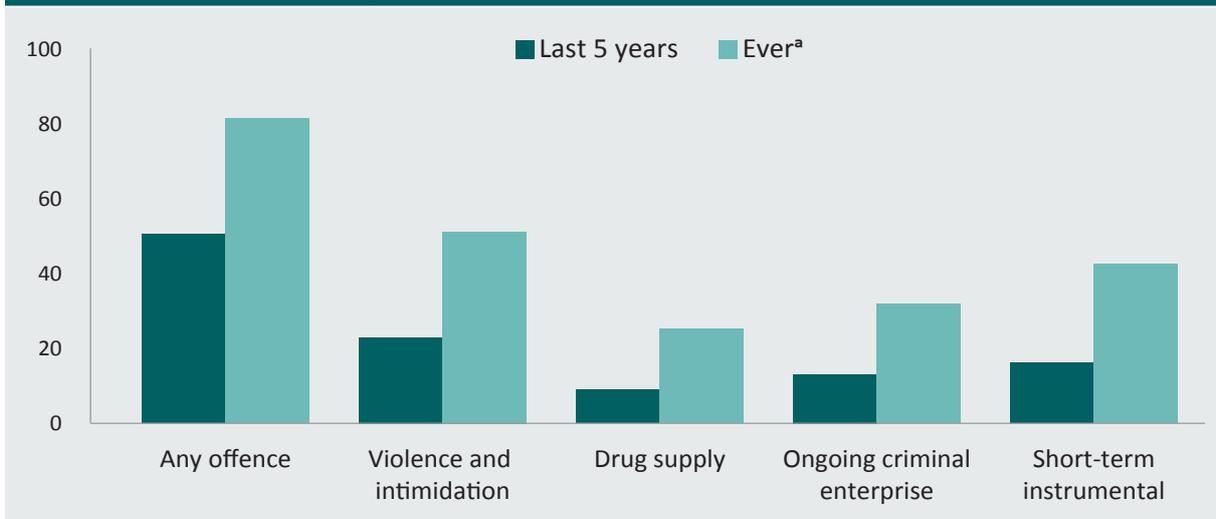
Prevalence of offending

Measures of the prevalence of offending by OMCG members and chapters were based on the analysis of both recent offending—defined as offences occurring in the five years up to and including 2017–18—and offending over their entire criminal history. Given the limits of historical apprehension data, ‘entire criminal history’ refers to all offences recorded since 1990. Recent offending is of particular interest, given it provides the best approximation of crime committed while affiliated with an OMCG, or in the period immediately prior to joining (when gang affiliations may still play a role). It also reflects the period in which there has been a more intense focus by law enforcement on OMCGs and their involvement in serious crime.

Half of all OMCG members (50%) had been apprehended by police for at least one recent offence, and four in five members (81%) had been apprehended for at least one offence since 1990 (Figure 2). One in four members (23%) had been apprehended for a recent violence and intimidation offence, while half (52%) had a recorded history of violent offending.

Profit-motivated offending was also common among members. Nine percent of members had been apprehended for a drug supply offence in the previous five years. One in eight members (13%) had a recent history of ongoing criminal enterprise, which includes commercial drug supply and other offences characteristic of organised crime. One in three members (32%) had a prior history of ongoing criminal enterprise. Short-term instrumental offences were slightly more common, with around one in six members (16%) having recently been apprehended for a short-term instrumental offence. Overall, more than one in five members (22%) had been apprehended for a profit-motivated offence—meaning either ongoing criminal enterprise or a short-term instrumental offence—within the last five years. Half of all members (51%) had a prior history of profit-motivated offending.

Figure 2: Prevalence of offending by OMCG members, by offence type (%) (n=5,665)

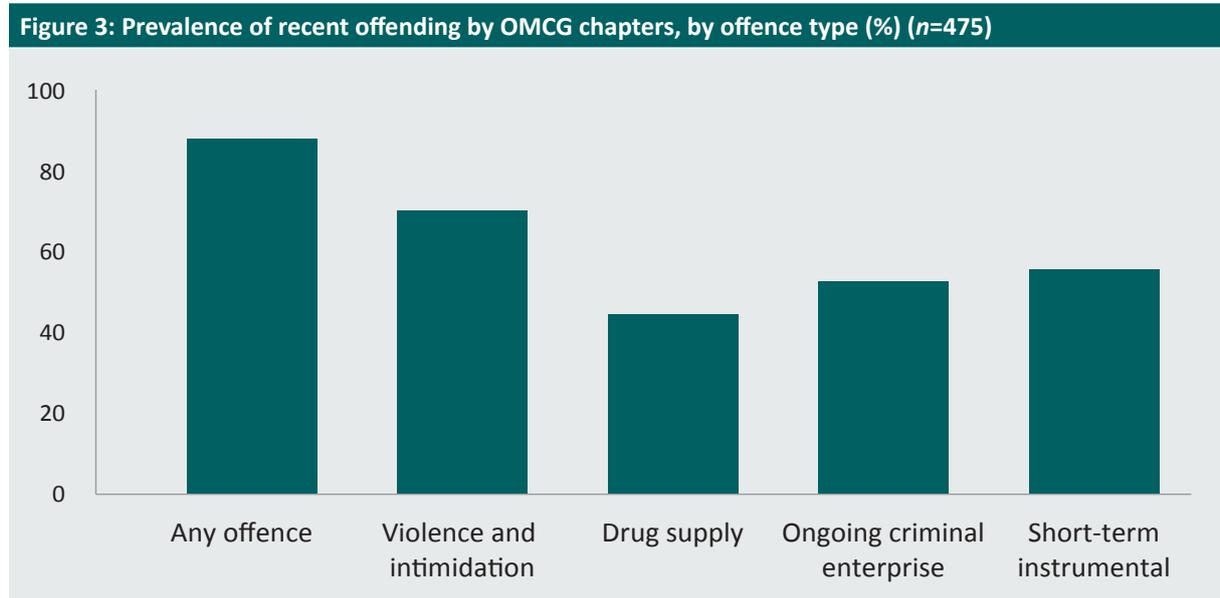


a: Includes all recorded offences since 1990 due to limits of historical criminal history data

Source: OMCG criminal history database 2019 [computer file]

While these offending rates seem high, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about how the level of offending among OMCG members compares to the general population without a comparison group of non-OMCG members. In place of this, rates of offending in this study were compared with the results of a recent birth cohort study from New South Wales, which measured rates of criminal justice contact among people born in 1984 up to age 33 (Weatherburn & Ramsey 2018). Importantly, Weatherburn and Ramsey (2018) defined criminal justice contact as a court appearance, youth justice conference or police caution, whereas our study is based on apprehension data; not all apprehensions will result in a court appearance or caution. Nevertheless, Weatherburn and Ramsey (2018) reported that 33 percent of all men born in 1984 had at least one criminal justice contact (excluding traffic offences) by age 33. In the current study, 85 percent of OMCG members who were born in 1984 ($n=142$) and 81 percent of OMCG members whose full criminal history from age 10 could be analysed ($n=659$) had been apprehended for at least one offence (excluding traffic offences) by the age of 33. Even with the potential for attrition of cases between arrest and a matter proceeding to court, this is a sizeable difference.

The prevalence of recent offending by OMCG chapters is based on whether at least one member within each chapter had been apprehended by police in the five years up to and including 2017–18 (Figure 3). The prevalence of offending was significantly higher among chapters, meaning that offending was more evenly distributed between groups than individuals.



Source: OMCG criminal history database 2019 [computer file]

Nine in 10 OMCG chapters (88%) had at least one member apprehended for an offence within the last five years. More than two-thirds of chapters (70%) had at least one member recently apprehended for violence and intimidation offences, more than two in five (44%) had at least one member with a recent drug supply offence, and more than half (53%) had at least one member apprehended for ongoing criminal enterprise. Overall, two-thirds of chapters (63%) had at least one member who had recently been apprehended for a profit-motivated offence.

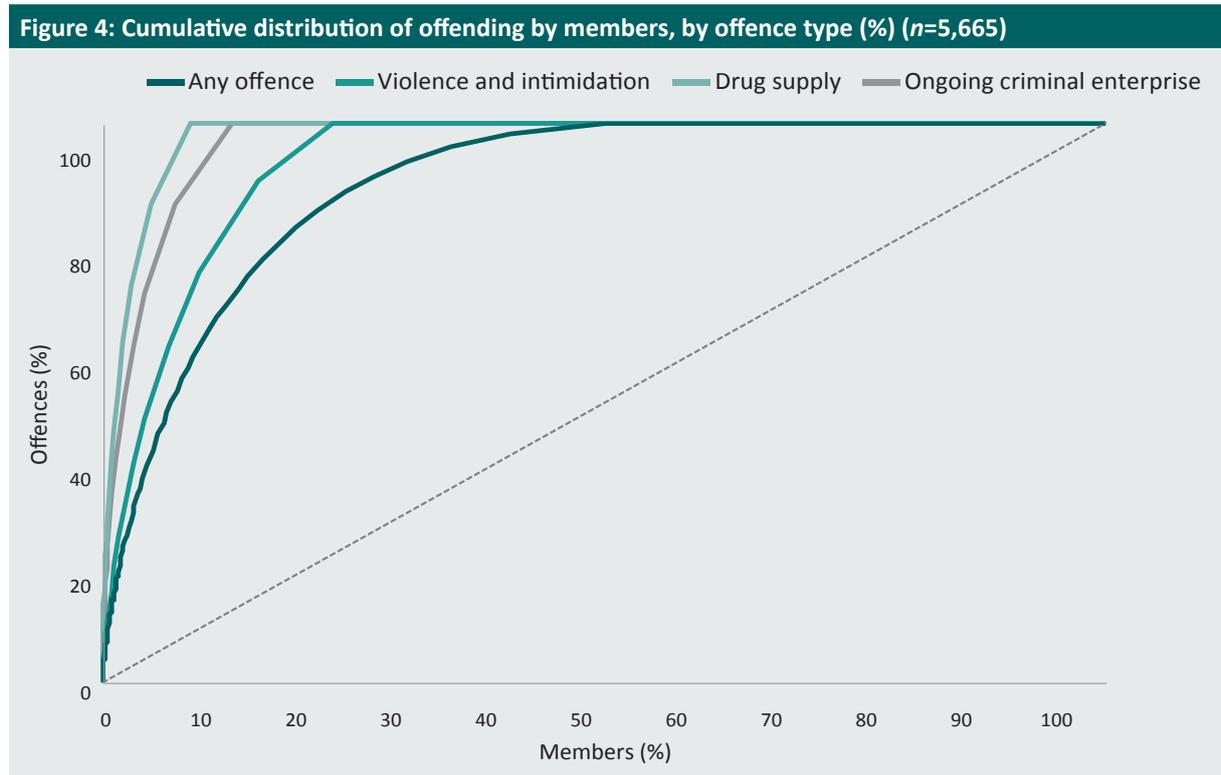
Concentration of offending and associated harms

Prevalence estimates overlook the disproportionate number of offences committed by a small group of members. It is well established that offending is concentrated among a relatively small group of individuals (Martinez et al. 2017). This is true even in studies focused on criminal groups (Ratcliffe & Kikuchi 2019). The next stage of the analysis therefore examined offending concentration among OMCG members and chapters.

Offending concentration takes into account both the prevalence of offending and the frequency of offending by those who offend. It is measured using the cumulative distribution of offending. The cumulative percentage of members is plotted on the x-axis, and the cumulative percentage of offences for which these offenders are responsible is plotted on the y-axis (a Lorenz curve). If offending were perfectly evenly distributed, it would follow the dotted 45-degree line, referred to as the line of equality (see Figure 4). The further the actual curve is from this line, the greater the concentration of offending.

Figure 4 displays the cumulative distribution of offending by members in four major offence categories—any offence, violence and intimidation, drug supply and ongoing criminal enterprise—in the five years up to and including 2017–18. This shows a high degree of concentration, with drug supply and criminal enterprise offences more heavily concentrated than violence and intimidation offences. In practical terms, this figure shows:

- five percent of members accounted for 42 percent of all offences;
- four percent of members accounted for 47 percent of all violence and intimidation offences;
- five percent of members accounted for 85 percent of all drug supply offences; and
- four percent of members accounted for 70 percent of all criminal enterprise offences.

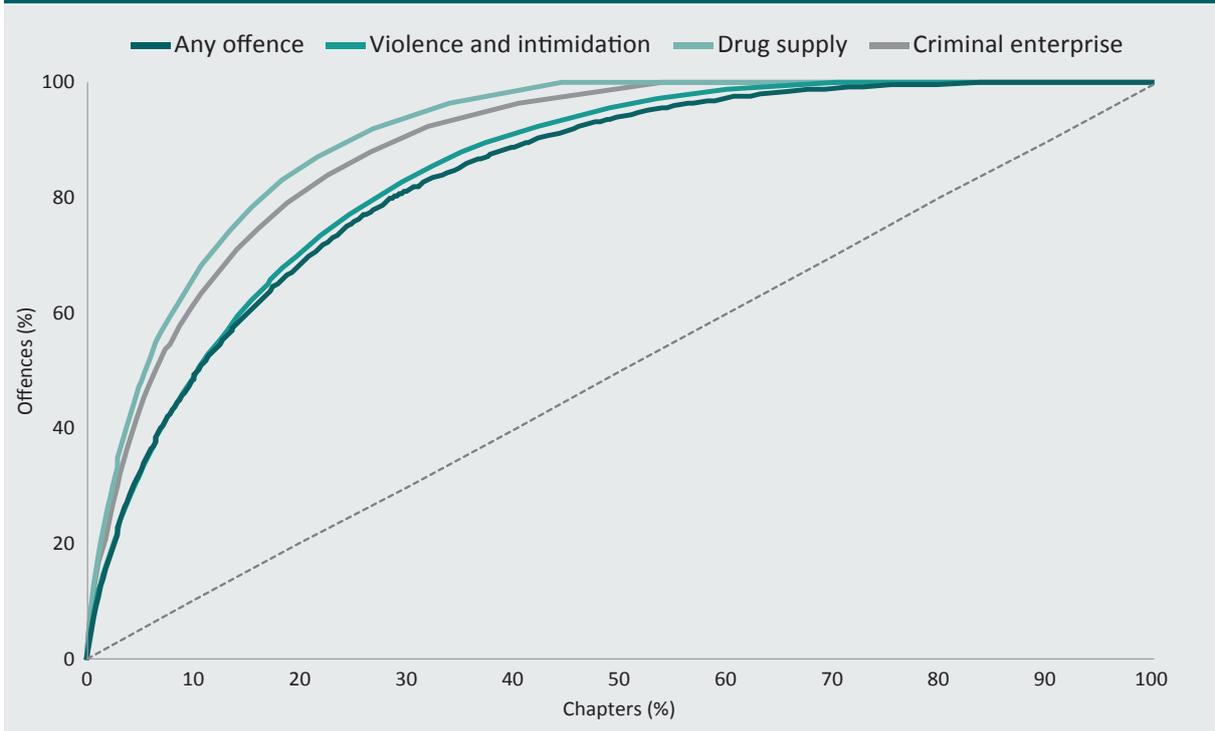


Source: OMCG criminal history database 2019 [computer file]

The same analysis was repeated for OMCG chapters (Figure 5). This shows that, while offending was not as concentrated among chapters as it was among members, a small proportion of chapters still accounted for a disproportionate amount of all crime committed by OMCGs over a five-year period. More specifically, five percent of chapters accounted for:

- 33 percent of all offences;
- 34 percent of all violence and intimidation offences;
- 48 percent of all drug supply offences; and
- 44 percent of all ongoing criminal enterprise offences.

Figure 5: Cumulative distribution of offending by chapters, by offence type (%) (n=475)

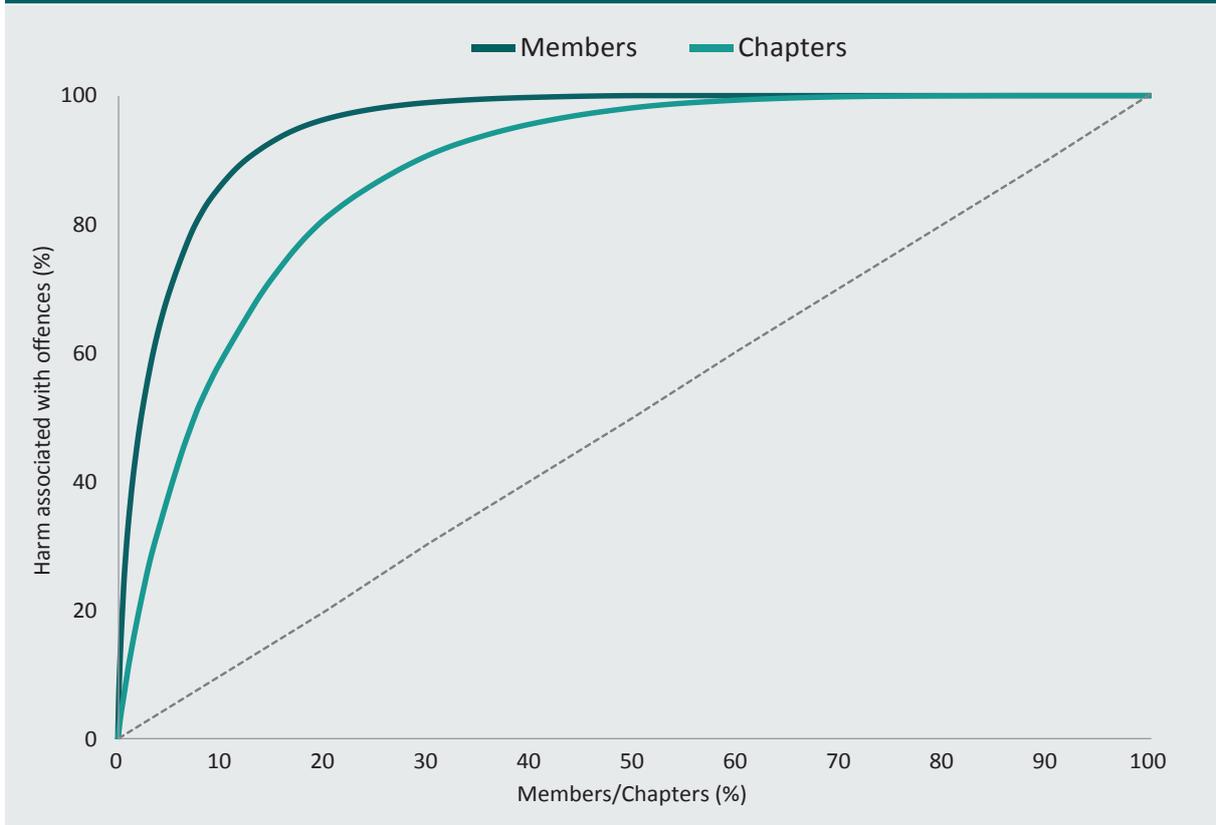


Source: OMCG criminal history database 2019 [computer file]

Within these selected offence categories there is a wide variation of offences with differing levels of harm to victims and the wider community. There is growing recognition of the potential value of measures of crime harm that better account for the impact of offences, rather than the number alone (Ashby 2017; Ratcliffe & Kikuchi 2019). Concentration of offending by both members and chapters was re-analysed using a modified version of the Western Australian Crime Harm Index (WACHI) developed by House and Neyroud (2018), which assigns the most common offence types a harm index based on the court penalties imposed on first-time offenders. The WACHI was developed for Australian Standard Offence Classification codes; these were mapped to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification (ANZSOC) codes used in the OMCG criminal history database, and weighted means were used to aggregate sub-groups into standard offence classifications. ANZSOC codes without a WACHI code were assigned a harm index in one of two ways—by estimating them directly based on equivalent offence types, or by using the imprisonment rates and average custodial sentence lengths published by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2019) and Sentencing Advisory Council (Vic) (2015) to calculate multipliers that were then used to estimate scores based on existing WACHI scores.

The cumulative distribution of offence harm was measured using the WACHI scores for all offences over a five-year period (Figure 6). The results showed that, while five percent of OMCG members accounted for around 42 percent of all recorded offences, five percent of members (not necessarily the same five percent) accounted for around 70 percent of the harm. This represents fewer than 300 of the 5,665 individuals in the sample. The results were not as stark at the group level, with five percent of chapters accounting for 39 percent of all harm (compared with 33 percent of all offences), indicating that the most harmful offences were more evenly spread across those chapters involved in criminal activity.

Figure 6: Cumulative distribution of offence harm (%)



Source: OMCG criminal history database 2019 [computer file]

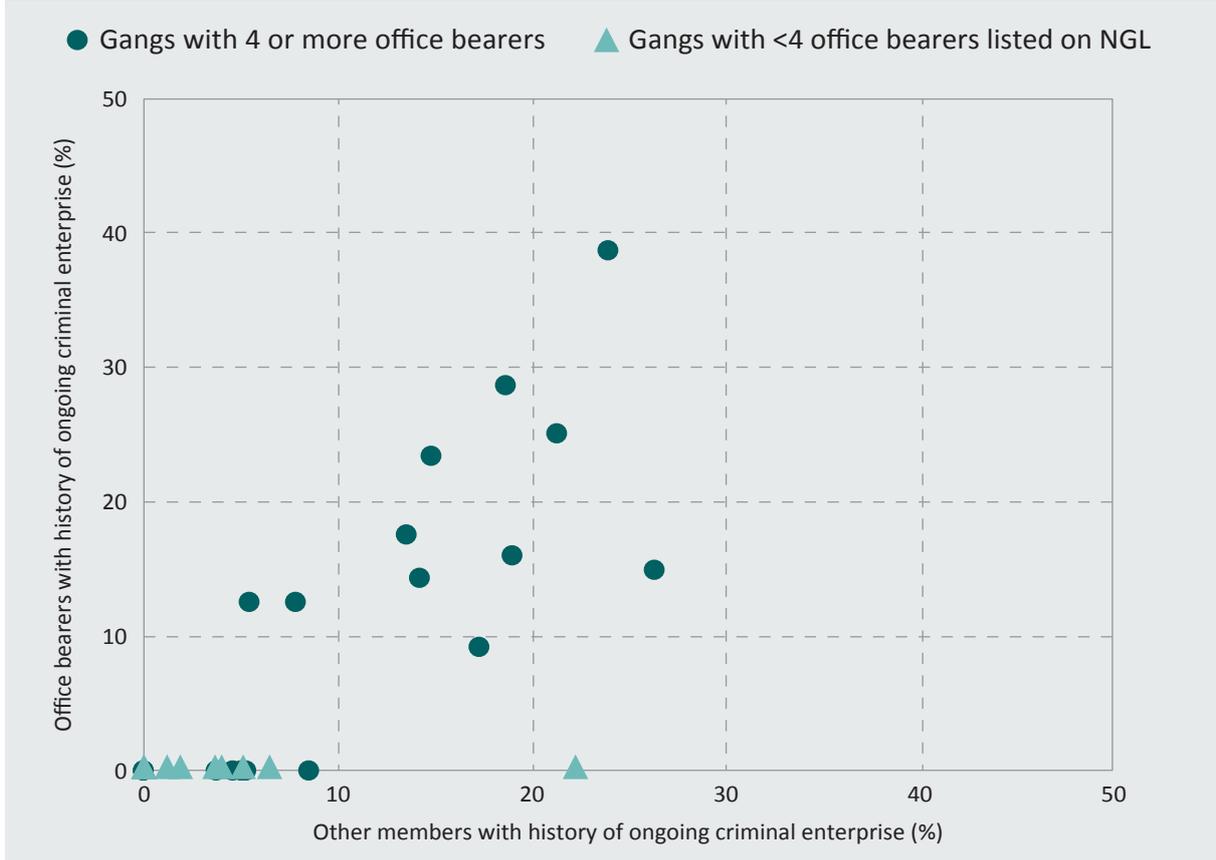
Assessing the degree to which OMCGs are criminal organisations

While the prevalence of offending at the group level—be it chapters or gangs—is very high, this does not directly address the question of whether OMCGs are criminal organisations, or whether they are groups with some members who are involved in criminal activity (Lauchs & Staines 2019; von Lampe 2019). Barker (2015) argued that the degree to which an OMCG is a criminal organisation is based on two criteria: the extent to which the members within a chapter or gang are involved in organised criminal activity, and whether the office bearers in that group—those performing an executive or leadership function—are involved in those activities.

Blokland, Soudijn and van der Leest (2017) operationalised this definition by plotting the percentage of members and the percentage of office bearers in the Netherlands who had a criminal record. Groups with a higher percentage of both members and office bearers with criminal records were assessed as being further along the criminal organisation continuum. We followed a similar approach; however, rather than relying on the presence of a criminal record—since the vast majority of members have been apprehended for at least one offence, some of which may be a consequence of proactive policing—the current study focused on ongoing criminal enterprise (Figure 7). Moreover, the focus was on recent offending (within the last five years), which provides the best approximation of crime committed while affiliated with an OMCG. Results are presented for gangs with four or more office bearers on the NGL ($n=18$) and gangs with fewer than four office bearers on the NGL ($n=10$).

Gangs that did not have any members identified as officer bearers on the NGL ($n=11$) were excluded from this assessment. Importantly, the absence of office bearers on the NGL does not mean a gang does not have any leaders; rather, it may be that individuals in leadership positions are not known to law enforcement, or law enforcement intelligence has not been able to establish which gang members hold leadership positions.

Figure 7: Prevalence of recent ongoing criminal enterprise among office bearers and other members, by gang ($n=28$)



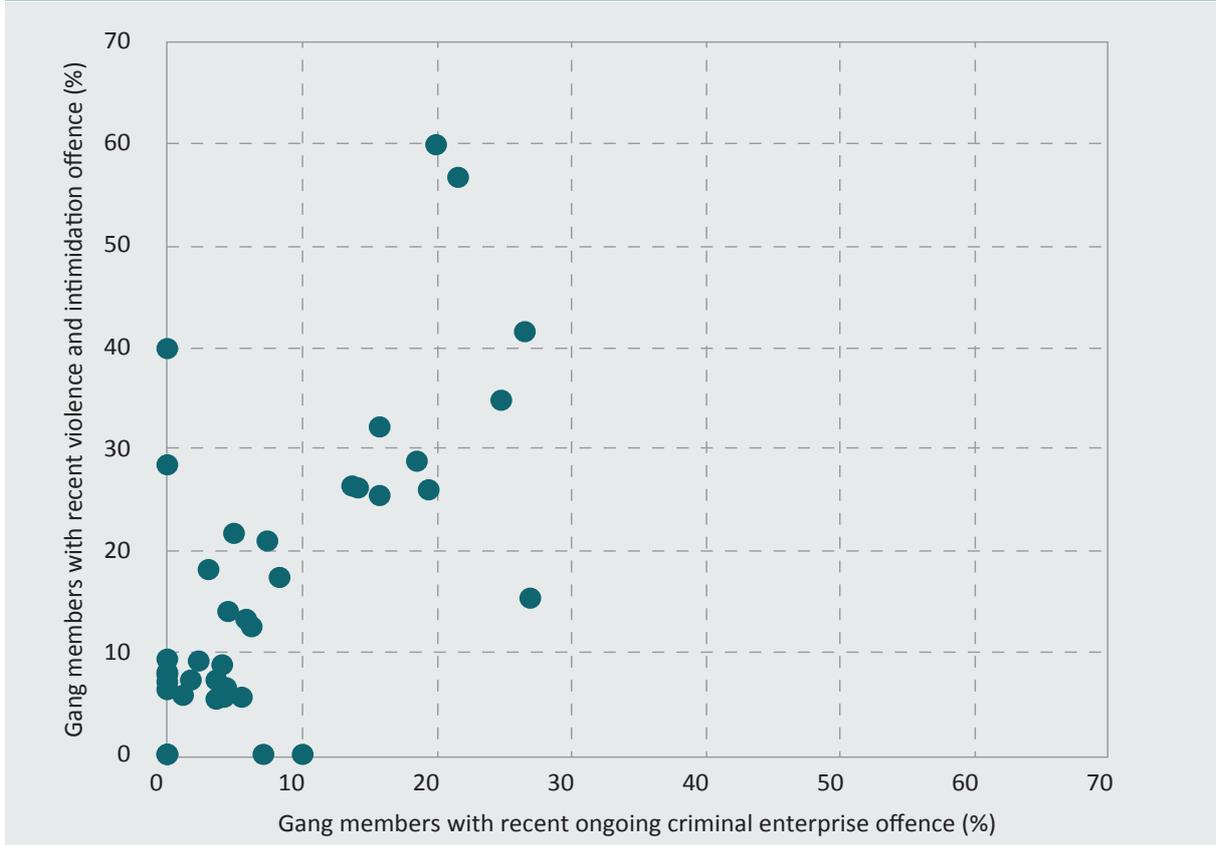
Note: Excludes gangs which do not have any office bearers listed on the NGL ($n=11$). Prevalence of recent offending based on five years up to and including 2017–18

Source: OMCG criminal history database 2019 [computer file]

The prevalence of recent ongoing criminal enterprise offences among office bearers and other members, by gang, is presented in Figure 7. Notably, given Barker’s (2015) criteria for identifying OMCGs as organised crime groups, in 11 gangs (39%) both office bearers and other members had been apprehended for organised crime-type offences. In eight of these gangs (44% of those with four or more office bearers, and 29% of all gangs with at least one officer bearer), at least 10 percent of office bearers and other members had been recently apprehended for ongoing criminal enterprise offences. The involvement of both office bearers and other members in recent organised crime-type offences indicates that these gangs are criminal organisations. This is a conservative assessment; when a longer observation period (25 years) is used, all gangs with four or more office bearers have both office bearers and other members with a history of ongoing criminal enterprise, and all 28 gangs with at least one office bearer on the NGL have members who have been involved in organised crime-type offending.

Finally, the prevalence of recent ongoing criminal enterprise offending among gangs was compared with the prevalence of recent violence and intimidation offences (Figure 8). Twenty-nine gangs (74%) had members with a recent history of ongoing criminal enterprise offences, while all but three gangs (92%) had members with recent violence and intimidation offences. There was a moderate positive correlation ($\rho=0.57$), indicating that gangs with a higher prevalence of recent ongoing criminal enterprise generally have a higher prevalence of violence and intimidation offences. More specifically, those gangs that were classified as criminal organisations also had a high propensity for violence and intimidation.

Figure 8: Prevalence of recent ongoing criminal enterprise and violence and intimidation offences, by gang (n=39)



Source: OMCG criminal history database 2019 [computer file]

Discussion

This paper has described the results from the analysis of recorded criminal offending among a national sample of Australian OMCGs. It builds upon the smaller, state-specific studies by Lauchs (2018), Lauchs and Staines (2019) and Goldsworthy and McGillivray (2017), which relied on open source data, and draws on recent international research using administrative data (Blokland et al. 2019; Klement 2016; Pederson 2018) to profile offending by OMCGs currently active in Australian states and territories. It addresses important questions about the prevalence and distribution of offending among OMCGs, including involvement in violent and organised crime.

Consistent with findings from overseas (Blokland, Soudijn & van der Leest 2017), the current study demonstrates the diversity that exists among Australian OMCGs in gang and chapter size, member age and offending profiles. Chapters vary significantly in size, ranging from a handful of members to much larger groups. They also vary in the age profile of members. While chapters comprise members of different ages, some chapters are dominated by younger members, with others comprising mostly older members. The offending profiles of chapters also vary. While a small number of chapters account for a disproportionate amount of recorded crime, some chapters have not had any members apprehended by police for recent offending. Gangs also vary in their propensity for violent and organised crime, as well as the extent to which senior leaders are involved in criminal activity.

Despite this diversity, several conclusions may be drawn about the criminal offending of OMCGs. There is a high prevalence of offending among OMCG members, including involvement in violence and intimidation and organised crime offending. In fact, recent profit-motivated offending—comprising both short-term instrumental offences and ongoing criminal enterprise—was as common among OMCG members as violent offences. While it is difficult to compare rates of offending in different populations, the prevalence of any offending (excluding driving offences) was substantially higher among OMCG members than among men reported in a recent NSW birth cohort study (Weatherburn & Ramsey 2018).

Despite the high prevalence overall, offending was still concentrated among a small proportion of members, as was the harm associated with offending. A similar pattern was observed among chapters; however, crime and crime-related harm were more evenly distributed among chapters than among individuals. Nevertheless, this is an important finding, because if these individuals can be identified and targeted for intervention—ideally early in their offending trajectory—the potential reduction in crime and associated harm is significantly greater. Some caution is needed here, since the reliance on arrest data may mean that office bearers and those successful at evading arrest are overlooked, but there is growing evidence of the potential benefits of a harm-focused approach to prioritising offenders, including in gang contexts (Ratcliffe & Kikuchi 2019).

Notwithstanding the concentration of offending, the fact that crime was more evenly distributed between chapters than between members, and that so many gangs had members—whether office bearers or not—with a recent history of violence and ongoing criminal enterprise, is consistent with the growing body of evidence that OMCG membership has an enhancement effect, meaning that joining a gang increases members' propensity to commit crime (Blokland et al. 2019). It is notable that nearly half of all offenders who had committed a violent or organised crime-type offence had done so in the last five years, when they were almost certainly affiliated with an OMCG. It is evident that OMCGs attract members with a propensity for committing violent and organised crime, and facilitate further offending among their members.

Given that previous Australian research has tended to suggest the organised criminality of OMCGs has been overstated (Goldsworthy & McGillivray 2017; Lauchs 2018; Lauchs & Staines 2019), it is of particular interest that the evidence presented here suggests that OMCG members, chapters and gangs are indeed frequently involved in offences associated with organised crime. Drawing on Barker's (2015) characterisation of criminal organisations, 11 gangs had members—including both office bearers and others—with recent histories of organised crime-type offending. In eight gangs (nearly one in three gangs with at least one office bearer), more than 10 percent of all members (office bearers and others) had been recently apprehended for organised crime-type offences. This indicates they are criminal organisations. Half of all chapters and three-quarters of the gangs on the NGL had members with a recent history of organised crime-type offending.

Further, those gangs with the highest prevalence of organised crime-type offences were among those with the highest prevalence of violence and intimidation offences. Although the motivation for and context of these offences cannot be determined from recorded crime data alone, the overlap between offence types suggests that the violence may be used to facilitate organised criminal activity, rather than being limited to 'barbarian' type offending (Lauchs, Bain & Bell 2015). OMCGs can use violence to enable organised crime offending in a number of ways, including in territorial disputes, in building the reputation of the gang or in extortion (Lauchs, Bain & Bell 2015).

This study provides, for the first time, a national picture of recorded offending by Australian OMCGs. While highlighting high rates of criminal activity, including violent and organised crime, it also demonstrates the potential value of law enforcement and policy measures targeted at high-risk individuals, chapters and gangs. Further work is needed to develop a better understanding of the individual and group-level factors that contribute to higher rates of criminal offending among OMCG members and gangs. Nevertheless, this paper represents an important first step in advancing our understanding of the relationship between OMCG membership and criminal offending.

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