

# Co-offenders provide key to crime patterns

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Flinders University law Professor David Bright from the Centre of Criminology Research. Credit: Flinders University

A large volume of criminal offending involves two or more individuals acting collaboratively—yet detailed analysis of co-offending is lacking to obtain more detailed and accurate pictures of criminal networks and broad crime patterns.

Much existing research on group [crime](#) is from the United States and Canada, but a new Australian report on co-offending has analysed arrest data from Melbourne and Sydney to assess the range of crime types committed by individuals and co-offenders across co-offending networks.

"The study of co-offending patterns is critical to developing a comprehensive understanding of crime statistics, theories of crime and criminal careers, estimation of societal harms, and the impact of policy interventions, including deterrence, incapacitation and rehabilitation," says Flinders University criminology expert Associate Professor David Bright.

The report—"Understanding the structure and composition of co-offending networks in Australia," by David Bright, Chad Whelan (Deakin University) and Carlo Morselli (The University of Montreal) – has been delivered to the Criminology Research Advisory Council , and published in the Australian Institute of Criminology's June issue of Trends & Issues In Crime And Criminal Justice.

By analysing arrest data for metropolitan Melbourne and Sydney to examine the structure of co-offending networks, the researchers identified patterns of co-offending that vary according to crime type, number of co-offenders, duration of offending, and offender age and gender.

The study also identifies implications for policy and law enforcement practice, underlining the importance of continuing with co-offender research.

"We cannot accurately calculate the incidence of crime and its impact without considering co-offending," says Associate Professor Bright.  
"Harms to victims are not always proportional, because some crimes

involve more than one offender."

Associate Professor Bright says co-offending may lead to longer criminal careers, compared with solo offending. "Our results suggest that police agencies should collect data on co-offending to inform their understanding of crime patterns within their jurisdiction," he says.

He suggests that such data collection and analysis should be conducted at the level of crime type, to facilitate a clear picture of co-offending as opposed solo offending, and to assist with the implementation of responsive policing strategies.

Associate Professor Bright says studying co-offending offers significant benefits for [law enforcement agencies](#) and policymakers to better understand crime and form improved prevention and intervention strategies. It will also provide significant cost benefits.

"The financial burden on the [criminal justice](#) system is greater when crimes involve more than one offender, intercepted by police and moving through the courts and correctional processes," he says.

"Breaking down co-offending patterns will change this."

**More information:** Understanding the structure and composition of co-offending networks in Australia. Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice no. 597. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

[www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi597](http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi597)

Provided by Flinders University

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