

# Research highlights new ways to tackle outlaw motorcycle gangs

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Deakin University criminology research can provide clues for law enforcement about the relationship between outlaw motorcycle gang (OMCG) clubs and how to combat gang crime.

The research, led by Professor of Criminology David Bright, builds on previous research by Deakin and the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) that examined the inner workings within and between rival OMCG clubs. The research was [published](#) in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*.

"Previous studies of OMCG clubs have tended to focus on offending at the individual level, but do not address the question of how gangs collaborate together in crime, or the role that club structures and hierarchies play in setting up these collaborations," Professor Bright says.

"Our research delves into the interactions between club members such as co-offending in criminal activities."

The research reveals that office bearers—such as club presidents—act as brokers to organize collaboration between rival clubs, using lower ranked members to carry out offenses on behalf of more senior members.

"Lower ranked members are more likely to offend than office bearers. This supports previous research showing that leaders tend to maintain distance from direct criminal activities, so they aren't at risk of arrest or conviction," Professor Bright says.

"Our findings suggest that office bearers, rather than simply offending less, may play some role in directing or influencing the offending of other members from behind the scenes, while taking care not to become directly involved in crime and risk attracting the attention of [law enforcement](#)."

"We also found that when lower ranked club members engaged in co-offending with members from other OMCG clubs, they were more likely to co-offend with members of the same rank."

The fascinating insights come after extensive analyses of de-identified NSW police records. Professor Bright says law enforcement needs to examine and combat these criminal networks in its efforts to disrupt and prevent illegal activity.

"Specifically, [intelligence agencies](#) and law enforcement agencies should collect data on co-offending within and across OMCG clubs and seek to disrupt connections between some of the key players."

"Our results suggest the focus of law enforcement should be on the co-offending networks involved in serious crime such as organized crime, rather than on specific clubs."

Most OMCG members have histories of offending, including fighting, [traffic violations](#), drug possession and disorderly conduct, as well as more serious violent and organized crime. OMCG clubs are sometimes portrayed as organized criminal groups.

Professor Bright says this is a contentious issue, both for criminology academics and law enforcement.

"There is often an assumption that all OMCG clubs are criminal or organized crime groups, but research tends to find that the reality is more nuanced. Some clubs do appear to operate as organized criminal groups, and some do not. Some OMCG members engage in crime, while others do not," he says.

"This has direct implications for how these gangs are policed. Our work suggests that rather than focusing on all outlaw motorcycle clubs—and all bikers for that matter—police should focus on intelligence collection and focus disruption attempts on the members and clubs that are involved in serious crime."

Commencing in mid-2024, Professor Bright will embark on a three-year research project. The project will also involve Deakin's Professor Chad Whelan and includes research partnerships with police agencies across Australia. The project aims to improve our understanding of OMCG crime and policies and practices that reduce such crime and related social harms.

**More information:** David Bright et al, Investigating the Dynamics of Outlaw Motorcycle Gang Co-Offending Networks: The Utility of Relational Hyper Event Models, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s10940-023-09576-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-023-09576-x)

Provided by Deakin University

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