

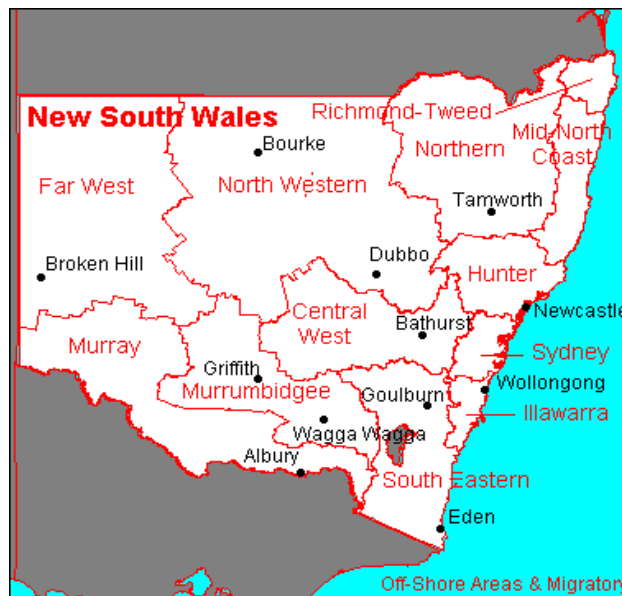
## Section 2

### Three inland rural towns

The three inland rural New South Wales towns selected for this study are distanced between 400 and 800 kilometres from the New South Wales capital of Sydney. Figure 1 shows the location of Wagga Wagga<sup>1</sup> in the south, in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistical division of Murrumbidgee. Both Dubbo<sup>2</sup>, toward the centre of the state and Bourke<sup>3</sup> in the north west are in the ABS North Western statistical division.

This Section provides a broader context in which to understand the issues raised by focus group participants in discussions about family violence and the legal response. It includes brief information about the history and economy of the towns, relevant demographic features and data on violent crime and AVOs.

Figure 1: New South Wales  
Statistical Divisions of the Australian Bureau of Statistics



Source: (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002)

#### 2.1 Agriculture and colonisation

The three towns were established in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> during the period of European colonisation. The river siting of the towns afforded a ready supply of water for agriculture and a transport link, with Bourke and Wagga Wagga quickly establishing ports for paddle steamers. Dubbo's railway also provided an important transport link to an area that was soon transformed into the 'wheat belt', of Far West New South Wales.

<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal word meaning 'place of many crows'

<sup>2</sup> Aboriginal word meaning 'red earth'

<sup>3</sup> Named after colonial explorer Burke, a member of the ill fated Burke and Wills expedition that explored inland Australia

Agriculture continues to be the main economic activity of these three towns. The trend toward agricultural diversification is evident in the three towns, and particularly important to Bourke, where the reliance on wool production is being overtaken by cotton, citrus, melons and more recently, grapes. The larger towns of Dubbo and Wagga Wagga have greater economic diversity by virtue of their role as regional centres for many government, non-government and commercial organisations.

Through colonisation and agricultural settlement local Indigenous people were dispossessed of their land and lifestyle, and used as cheap labour for agriculture. Many Aboriginal people living in the towns today have direct experience, or experience passed down from parents and grandparents, of the forced removal of their people from the land and of children from families. Aboriginal resistance to these removals, carried out by police, church and welfare authorities, often resulted in conflict with the colonial police and courts. Visible reminders of the violent clashes that marked colonisation include the heritage-listed court buildings that still function in the towns as Local Courts, Children’s Courts and District Courts. Before Dubbo gaol was converted to its current museum use in 1966, its gallows claimed the lives of eight male offenders, two of whom were Aboriginal. Visible from the courthouse grounds, it is a stark reminder of the violence of colonisation.

## 2.2 Population profiles

The proportion of Australians living in rural areas declined from 43% in 1911 to 14% in 1996 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002b). As the largest inland rural town of New South Wales, Wagga Wagga has been less adversely affected than many others have by the recent trends in rural towns of declining economy, population and service infrastructure. Dubbo has been identified as an exception to the trend of rural decline, and described as a ‘sponge city’ (Salt 2001:9), attracting population and services from declining nearby towns. Like a majority of smaller rural towns Bourke has experienced a progressive decline in population and services.

Table 1: Populations – indicators of cultural mix, age and income sources

	New South Wales		Wagga Wagga		Dubbo		Bourke	
	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001
<b>Indicator</b>								
Population	6,038,696	6,371,745	55,532	50,634	33,440	34,232	4,049	3,908
ATSI (Indigenous)	1.6%	1.9%	2.5%	3.4%	7%	9.7%	25%	25%
Overseas born	23%	23%	7%	6.4%	5%	4.9%	4%	5.1%
Median age in years	34	35	29	31	31	33	30	32
Persons aged 0-14	19.6%	21%	22.6%	22.4%	25.3%	24.8%	27.3%	26.7%
Unemployment rate	4.5%	N/A	6.4%	N/A	4.9%	N/A	7%	N/A
Centrelink clients As a % of persons aged 15 yrs and older	21.8%	N/A	25.6%	N/A	28.2%	N/A	29.9%	N/A

Adapted from: (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002)

Table 1 shows differences in the demographic make up of the selected towns compared to New South Wales, with respect to cultural mix, age and sources of income. Census data for 2001 found that overseas born people constituted at most 6.4% (Wagga Wagga) of the population in the selected towns, compared to 23% for New South Wales. In 2001 Aboriginal people comprised between 25% (Bourke) and

3.4% (Wagga Wagga) of the town populations compared with 1.9% for New South Wales (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002). For these towns, the smaller the population size, the higher is the representation of children under fifteen years, with Bourke's 26.7% of child population being notably higher than the New South Wales figure of 21%.

Socio-economic indicators available from 1996 Census<sup>4</sup> data provide estimates of both the unemployment rates and the percentage of the population over 15 years of age who are clients of Centrelink, the government provider of income security benefits. In all these towns the percentage of the population at the low end of these indicators was higher than the State total. While Dubbo's unemployment rate of 4.9% differed less markedly from the State rate of 4.5%, the rates of 6.4% for Wagga Wagga and 7% for Bourke exceeded the State rate by more than half again. Similarly, in all three towns Centrelink clients were more highly represented amongst the 15 years and over age group which qualifies for benefits, than in the State total of 21.8%, with the difference being most marked in Bourke with 29.9%, closely followed by Dubbo at 28.2%.

### 2.3 Officially recorded violent crime

Table 2: Selected officially recorded violent crimes in 1999-2001\*

Offence type	NSW			Wagga Wagga			Dubbo			Bourke		
	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
Assault	914.5	971.7	1,034.8	1,246.2	1,360.9	1,867.7	1,401.2	1,531.5	1,652.7	7,926.8	8,637.6	8,337.6
Sexual assault	49.8	55.9	56.2	96.1	82.6	86.7	56.2	92.6	86.8	159.1	406.7	354.2
Weapons offences	146.2	144.0	160.2	144.2	159.8	242.0	171.1	209.8	234.2	1,670.2	1,008.2	1,961.9

\*Rates per 100,000 population

Source: Adapted from (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2001b)

Table 2 shows the incidence within the three towns of crimes of assault, sexual assault and weapons offences. These crimes are considered here as indicators of violence in the community generally, and include sexual assault, an offence for which women constitute the vast majority of victims. Compared to New South Wales, the three towns have higher rates of all three offences. Bourke is the most extreme. In 1999 rates of selected crimes exceeded the New South Wales rate for assault by 8.7 times, sexual assault by 3.2 times and weapons offences by 11.4 times. In 2001 Bourke's rates had increased to exceed New South Wales for assault by 12.4 times, sexual assault by 6.3 times and weapons offences by 12.2 times.

The high representation of Aboriginal people in these towns, considered together with the high rates of reported violent offences indicate that Aboriginal women in the towns confront a comparatively high risk of becoming victims of violence. An Australian study of homicide rates for Indigenous women found that Indigenous

<sup>4</sup> Equivalent statistics for 2001 were not provided in the first release of census data on 17 June 2002

women face a far greater risk of violence resulting in death than non-Indigenous women, and also that Indigenous femicide victims are more likely to be killed by their intimate partners (Mouzos 1999:16). Not inconsistent with this finding were participant reports of Aboriginal women in these communities having died as a result of family violence.

## 2.4 Domestic Apprehended Violence Orders

Another indicator of levels of violence can be found in Local Court statistics of Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) granted. In New South Wales civil legislation enables people experiencing interpersonal or domestic violence to seek legal protection of an AVO. Under the AVO scheme, two kinds of orders can be sought that cover violence occurring between people in different relationships. People seeking protection from actual or threatened violence can obtain apprehended Personal Violence Orders (APVOs) by a person with whom they have no intimate or domestic relationship. Those experiencing or threatened with violence from someone in an intimate or domestic relationship can seek Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs).

Table 3 shows the rates of ADVOs granted in 1998-2000 per 100,000 populations for New South Wales and the statistical divisions of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in which the three towns are located. Comparisons between the rates for New South Wales and these statistical divisions show the Murrumbidgee and North West regions consistently higher. The higher rates of ADVOs granted needs to be understood in the context of higher rates of officially recorded violent crime reported above. The rate at which ADVOs were granted in 2000 is 1.9 times higher in the North Western statistical division, which includes Bourke and Dubbo, than for New South Wales. This difference is not as large as differences in the rates of violent crimes in the same year. As evidenced above, in 2000 the rate of sexual assault in Bourke exceeded the New South Wales rate by 6.3 times, and the rate of ADVOs granted only exceeded it by 1.9 times. A comparison of these statistics for Bourke in 1999 and 2000 shows that while the rate of officially recorded sexual assault more than doubled (from 159.1 in 1999 to 406.7 in 2000); there was a decline in the rate of ADVOs granted (from 491.5 per 100,000 population in 1999 to 454.3 in 2000). On the positive side, this reflects increased use by victims, most often women and children, and police of criminal justice responses to sexual violence. However, it cannot be assumed that the corresponding decline in the rate of ADVOs granted is explained by an improved criminal justice response to family violence. The increase in officially recorded sexual assault offences might be due to an increase in the incidence of actual violent crimes affecting women, not simply an increase in reporting, and the decline in ADVOs granted might be an indicator that in Bourke, ADVOs have increasingly been underutilised.

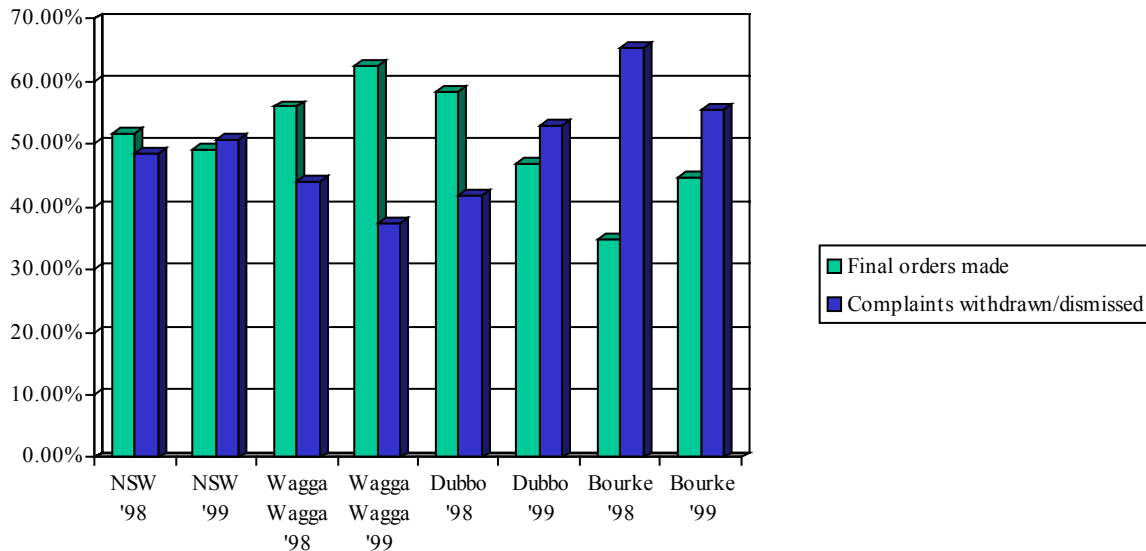
Table 3: Local Court statistics of AVOs for domestic violence granted in 1998-2000

Statistical division	1998	1999	2000
North Western Includes Dubbo & Bourke	490.0	491.5	454.3
Murrumbidgee Includes Wagga Wagga	306.6	327.6	342.2
New South Wales	239.6	231.7	241.1

Key: \* Refers to rate per 100,000 population

Source: Adapted from (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2001a)

Figure 2: Outcomes of domestic AVO applications in 1998-1999



Note: Data reported as the percentage of all applications that were either made or withdrawn/dismissed

Source: Adapted from (NSW Attorney General's Department 2000)

Not all AVO applications result in a final order being granted. Figure 1 is based on unpublished Local Courts data<sup>5</sup> that can only be regarded as indicative. It indicates that in 1998 and 1999, close to half of all ADVO applications in New South Wales, both personal and domestic, resulted in a final order and half were withdrawn or dismissed. It also shows differences over time and across locations. In both years a higher percentage of applications made to Wagga Wagga Local Courts resulted in a final order, and approximated 56% in 1998 and 63% in 1999. At Dubbo, the 1998 rate of ADVOs granted was 58%, declining in 1999 to 48%. At Bourke, a larger percentage of applications in both years were withdrawn or dismissed, the percentage of final orders granted approximating 35% in 1998 and 43% in 1999.

This data can provide some indication of the effectiveness of the ADVO response, through time and across locations. Comparing the 1998 and 1999 rates of ADVOs granted in Wagga Wagga and Bourke can illustrate this. When considered together with information about the historical development of services, one possible explanation for the differences is the positive impact of the CAS. At Wagga Wagga, where CAS was well established before 1998, the percentage of applications that resulted in final orders was higher than for New South Wales in both 1998 and 1999. At Bourke, where CAS was an emerging service in 1999, the percentage of orders granted increased from 35% in 1998 to 43% in 1999.

Since the commencement of the AVO legislation in 1983, there has been no comprehensive evaluation of the New South Wales AVO scheme. A limited scope evaluation conducted by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)

<sup>5</sup> This data is collected by the Office of the Director of Local Courts for internal management purposes, and can only be taken as indicative due to concerns about its reliability.

found that the vast majority of people who had been granted a domestic or personal AVO through the Local Court reported a reduction in the incidence of the negative behaviours by the perpetrator after the order was made (Trimboli & Bonney 1997:viii). However, the evaluation did not include the experiences of applicants who were not granted an order, nor of applicants in rural or remote locations.

## **2.5 Summary**

The limited review of demographic and economic data shows that, compared to New South Wales, the populations of these towns are less culturally diverse, and have higher representations of people who are Aboriginal, under 14 years of age, unemployed, and economically dependent on government welfare payments. The co-existence of these factors is cited elsewhere in describing the over-representation of Indigenous people Australia-wide on all indicators of socio-economic disadvantage (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997).

Crime data shows that these towns have higher levels of officially recorded crimes of assault, sexual assault and weapons offences than for New South Wales. The comparatively higher rates of ADVO applications in the three towns does not consistently result in higher rates of final orders being granted, with the percentage of applications resulting in a final order being consistently the lowest in Bourke.

This patchwork of statistics shows that quantitative data could well provide information about decisions made by applicants for protection orders and justice personnel. Well planned and collected data is the foundation of evidence based practice. The effectiveness of the protection orders could be monitored and improved by the refinement of existing data to enable the monitoring of the system through time, across locations and for different categories of users. Statistical data, considered together with information from individual and professional users of the system, can be used to target aspects of the protective response that could be improved.

