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A Tale of Two Towns: Social Structure, Integration and Crime in Rural New South Wales

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines social factors that are associated with crime in two rural Australian communities with high proportions of Aboriginal people. It draws upon the theoretical contributions of Braithwaite (1989) to explain how levels of community integration and cohesion affect the presence of crime. Data for the case studies are derived from secondary statistics, surveys, observation and in-depth interviews. Existing literature on crime in Australia emphasises the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal people within the criminal justice system. Yet, by comparing and contrasting the two communities, the analysis demonstrated that social structural and perceptual characteristics, rather than Indigenous status, account for high levels of crime in one community and low levels in the other. The analyses demonstrate that communities with high levels of social cohesion can ameliorate the affects of social disorganisation, division, and disadvantage in communities with high Aboriginal populations. It further demonstrates that rural crime is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Some social scientists consider Aboriginality to be the most important factor affecting crime in Australia (Boss, Edwards and Pitman, 1995, 162-163). This paper describes how residents of two rural Australian communities with high proportions of Aboriginal people perceive the relationship between crime and community cohesion. The findings, which follow from Braithwaite's (1989) notions of community, indicate that social cohesion and social integration in these communities, rather than Aboriginality, *per se*, explain their levels of crime and other social problems.

In an earlier study by the authors (Jobes, Barclay and Donnermeyer, 2004), quantitative analyses of census data and crime rates across 122 rural Local Government Areas (LGAs) in New South Wales indicated that greater community cohesion and integration were associated with less crime. The analyses presented here describe how residents explain the dynamics of local crime and social problems. Strang and Braithwaite (2001) use the term restorative justice. The findings emphasise the classic distinction between supportive controls and reactive controls that help inhibit participation in criminal activity. Supportive controls include an institutional framework in the community that helps prevent crime. Supportive controls imply organised institutions; familial cohesion, employment, population stability, moral and ethical foundations and ethnic and racial integration. Reactive controls include social structures such as the police and courts that are intentionally established to respond to social and behavioural problems. We further distinguish between "natural" controls, norms and structures that have evolved locally through the activities of long-term residents, and "manufactured" controls that have been introduced and maintained by people who come to the area from the outside, including government employees and newly arrived workers, among others.

This research falls within the integration tradition, which Tittle (2000) has identified as a predominant theme of 20th century criminology. The rural focus of this work is somewhat distinct because most previous research has investigated urban crime. In *Crime Shame and Reintegration (CSR)*, Braithwaite (1989: 10-15, 156-158, 170-171) emphasises that to be effective, social control (punishment) must be an integral part of the community. Integration acts to inhibit, that is, to control individuals from becoming criminal (Hirschi, 1969). Integration also affects the social cohesion and consequent levels of disorganisation in the community (Kornhauser, 1978). According to Tittle, *CSR* emphasises the control of individuals by eliciting shame to re-establish bonds of respect between the community and

violators. Braithwaite never veers from a broad communitarian project of engaging the community to establish bonds that would prevent crime.

Much can be learned about crime through the study of community. In their theory of density of acquaintanceship, Freudenberg and Jones (1986) expanded upon Durkheim's (1947) concept of social cohesion and its impact on control of deviance in rapidly growing rural communities. Social scientists have demonstrated how family disintegration (Sampson, 1985), unemployment (Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985), poverty (Smith, 1994) and other aspects of social disorganisation (Sampson and Groves, 1989) are predispositions of crime. Wilson and Kelling (1982) have argued that even perceiving a local area as disorganised increases the likelihood that crime will occur there. Fischer's (1975, 1995) sub-cultural theory combines these factors to explain why heterogeneous populations living in concentrated locations have differential levels of crime. Because some culturally identifiable subpopulations experience disproportionately more social disorganisation, their levels of crime are disproportionately greater.

Braithwaite's early work on restorative justice relied heavily on communitarian assumptions regarding the structure and processes of communities. Later, in *Not Just Deserts*, he and Petit (1990) more explicitly explored the political and philosophical foundations of society that justify integration within a communitarian model. More recently, Strang and Braithwaite (2001) have edited *Restorative Justice and Civil Society*, a collection of philosophical-descriptive papers, which apply "Republican theory" to a variety of historical and political contexts. Republican theory addresses "a virtuous circle where restorative justice supports civil society and state authority" (p. 10).

While drawing on social disorganisation and social control as the structural foundations of his theory, Braithwaite also emphasises the importance of community interaction on deviant members. Labelling is the process by which stigma is imposed by the community and identity is assumed by the individual. Braithwaite further distinguishes positive (reintegrative) shaming, which identifies and brings the deviant back into the conventional community, and negative (stigmatising) shaming, which drives the deviant into problematic subcultures. The present study sought to understand whether stigmatisation of Aboriginality was communicated and whether that influenced the integration and reintegration of problematic and potentially problematic people in the case study communities. It examines whether the effects of labelling are visible in both communities, independent of the structural disadvantages they may suffer.

Study Sites

Stage one of this study identified clusters that differentiated social and demographic profiles of rural New South Wales (NSW) communities and their levels of crime.

Greenhills*, a large coastal town, and Hillnest*, a small inland community, both with high proportions of Aboriginal People were selected as the case studies. Prior research has concentrated on atypical communities with high proportions of Aboriginal People and very high crime rates (Cunneen and Robb, 1987; Cunneen, 1992). Greenhills and Hillnest have characteristics more typical of rural communities in New South Wales with respect to migration, ethnic diversity, family diversity, geographical location, population size and growth, income level and industry base (See Table1).

On crime, however, they differ dramatically on crime, according to official police statistics (BOSCAR, 1998; 2000). The crime rate figures in Table 1 reflect 4-year averages, as annual rates of crime can vary greatly from one year to another in smaller communities like Greenhills and Hillnest. The 4-year average was slightly over 400 assaults per 100,000 population in Hillnest. In sharp contrast, the assault rate in Greenhills exceeded 1,300 per 100,000 persons. Similarly, the rate of break and enter was more than three times less for Hillnest compared to Greenhills, whilst the rate of motor vehicle theft was nearly 7 higher in Greenhills, and more than 3 times higher for malicious damage. Although drug offences increased dramatically in Hillnest in 1999, the 4-year average rate was much lower than in Greenhills. In fact, the official crime profile for Greenhills more closely resembled all of New South Wales, which includes the large metropolitan areas of Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle.

Throughout this investigation of crime, Aboriginality was at least a latent, and frequently a manifest, theme (Merton 1936). In 1993, across all of Australia, Aboriginal persons aged 10 to 17 years were 24.2 times more likely to be in custody than non-Aboriginal persons. For those aged 18 to 21 years, the over-representation rate was 9.6 (Dagger, 1993). As the greater proportion of appearances by Aboriginal people before courts involve children, there is a cumulative effect on sentencing. Aboriginal adults receive harsher sentences due to their prior convictions (Wilson, 1988, cited in Hogg and Carrington, 1998). Within prison populations, Aboriginal people are especially over-represented in offence types involving violence, breaking and entering, and breaches of justice procedures and driving offences, but are less represented in fraud and drug offence categories (Walker and Salloom, 1993). Cunneen and White (2002) report Aboriginal youth tend to commit similar levels of property

crimes as do non-Aboriginal youth, but commit more serious break and enters and are arrested for more public order offences. They suggest that the exercise of police discretion, different opportunities between urban and rural environments, a culture of resistance against non-Aboriginal persons and property, and the inordinate disadvantages Aboriginal people experience with regard to health, economic position, education and welfare dependency account for these differences. Similarly, Jobes *et al* (2004) found that assaults, breaking and entering and malicious damage were higher in communities, including Greenhills, with high proportions of Aboriginal people.

METHODOLOGY

Primary data were collected through three methods; a mailed self report questionnaire, in depth interviews and focus groups. A quasi-experimental research design (Cook and Campbell, 1979) examined the relationship between social cohesion and crime by measuring community size, location, and proportion of Aboriginal residents and recorded levels of crime as criterion variables. Individual perceptions about community is the unit of analysis, though we do infer how perceived conditions might affect criminal motivations, identities, choices and behaviours. Each case represents a particular type of community in rural NSW. Greenhills is a large agricultural and light-industrial town located about fifteen miles from the ocean. The town has relatively little growth and high crime. Hillnest is a small, stable, inland, agricultural community with relatively low crime.

Self-Report Questionnaire

In February 2000, a self-administered questionnaire was mailed to random samples of households in the communities along with a covering letter and a reply-paid self-addressed envelope. Names and addresses of 100 households in Hillnest and 150 in Greenhills were drawn at random from Telstra's (the State telephone company) White Pages for 1999. More were selected in Greenhills to compensate for its higher "return to sender" rate resulting from a heavy turnover of population. A reminder notice and questionnaire were sent to non-respondents after four weeks.

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate on a Likert scale, fifteen strengths and fifteen problems within their community (see Table 2). Crime was included as a social variable within both scales. These strengths included: lifestyle; good employment opportunities; economic growth; family values; low drugs and alcohol; low crime; good sport

facilities; good schooling; good health services; healthy environment; strong leadership; strong community spirit; good mix of people; friendliness; and trust of people in the community. Similarly, respondents rated each item from a list of fifteen community problems: people leaving; unemployment; economic decline; family breakdown; drugs and alcohol; increasing crime; poor sports facilities; poor schooling; poor health services; environmental hazards; poor leadership; division between people; no privacy; and no trust (see Table 2).

The sample sizes (and response rates, which allow for return to senders) were 46 (32%) for Greenhills and 46 (49%) for Hillnest. Their ages ranged between 17 and 89 (mean 53 years). More were married (64%) than single (36%). Education levels ranged from university degree (19.5%), trade qualification (28.8%), high school certificate (21%), part of high school (24.9%), to primary school (4.9%).

Interviews and focus groups

Two of the authors conducted face-to-face interviews and focus groups among 30 representatives of various community services within 18 meetings in Greenhills and 24 representatives within 19 meetings in Hillnest. Focus groups and some face-to-face interviews with service providers were taped and transcribed. In addition to answering a common set of questions regarding community problems and social cohesion (see Table 3), these respondents answered questions related to their specific organisations. Local police discussed the main types of crime and issues encountered in policing the community. Ambulance officers are frequently the first to see the human tragedy associated with crime. Community health workers provided an overview of support services available in the community as well as insight into the extent of drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence. School principals shed insight to the issues facing youth in the community. Catholic priests provided an understanding of the social problems they encounter in their parish. Local newspaper editors focused on current issues facing their local community. Aboriginal Elders were interviewed to gather their perceptions of crime in the community and the impact of crime upon local Aboriginal People. Security officers provided a knowledgeable and unique perspective of crime. The Mayor or Community Manager provided an overview of the issues in their town and actions the community had taken to address local social problems.

Supplemental interviews were conducted with nine personnel from services in the communities, including Probation and Parole, Community Neighbourhood Centres and Police Citizen's Youth Clubs. A second set of supplemental interviews was conducted with a sample

of about ten local residents within each community. The mailed questionnaire had invited residents to participate further in the study through a face-to-face interview. Those who responded positively to this request were telephoned to arrange personal interviews that focused upon local crime. These participants came from a cross-section of the community, including school teachers, local business owners, farmers, office workers, artists, young mothers and their children, and retirees. Their ages ranged from 11 to 73 years (mean 47.2 years). There were slightly more men (55%) than women (45%). The length of time they had lived in the community varied from being relative newcomers to life-long residents.

FINDINGS

Results of the Mail Survey

Community strengths and problems

The mail survey identified how residents perceived substantive qualities of their communities, and how their perceptions of the seriousness of crime compared to other social and economic issues in their community. A major strength/problem was assigned a score of 3, a minor strength/problem was given a score of 2, and not a strength/problem was scored a 1 (Table 2). The highest ratings in Greenhills were reserved for healthy, natural environment (av. = 2.71) and great lifestyle (av. = 2.61); and although respondents from Hillnest also rated a healthy, natural environment the highest (av. = 2.76), good schools (av. = 2.57), good health and welfare services (av. = 2.52) and friendliness (av. = 2.49) were seen as major strengths as well. Lack of jobs was the most highly rated problem amongst respondents from both communities.

Frequencies for each of the three point attitudinal items were grouped on a community basis, producing a 3x3 data matrix for both communities. Key dimensions underlying respondents' perceptions were identified through multi-dimensional scaling, which is a perceptual mapping technique that transforms residents' responses into distances, represented within multi-dimensional space. The technique obtains comparative valuations and their interrelationships across a range of social factors when the specific bases of comparisons are undefinable (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 1995). This multi-dimensional scaling analysis provided graphical representations of the residents' attitudinal responses to the fifteen strengths and fifteen problems of their community.

Figures 1 and 2 display the results of the multi-dimensional analysis for both communities. For each map, a vector represents the levels of consensus towards a particular strength or problem. Items were grouped according to the degree they represent major

strengths, minor strengths, or not a strength. Similar groupings were applied for the mapping of the community problems. At first glance, the responses from the two communities seem quite similar. For example, neither community considered economic growth to be a strength (Figure 1). Further, economic issues, economic decline and unemployment, were perceived to be major problems in both Greenhills and Hillnest (Figure 2). Economy has become the ubiquitous contemporary metaphor expressing cause and solution to local problems (Jobes, 2000).

Yet, on closer examination, subtle, but profound differences become apparent. Although crime was identified as a major problem in both communities, family breakdown and substance abuse were noted as major problems in Greenhills, but only minor problems in Hillnest (Table 2). Family breakdown is in close proximity to concerns about crime. Further, low crime was not a strength in Greenhills and a minor strength in Hillnest (Figure 1) on the multi-dimensional mapping (Table 2). The central importance of the family, drugs and crime was apparent throughout subsequent interviews.

The quality of social services is a common focus in small towns. Education facilities were considered to be a major strength in both towns. Sports and recreational facilities were listed as a major strength in Hillnest, though a few respondents indicated that social and cultural events were not a strength there. Health services in Hillnest were excellent for a small country town and residents listed them as a major strength. Health services were a minor strength in Greenhills. Strong community leadership was a minor strength in both Hillnest and Greenhills. However, poor leadership was listed as a minor problem in both communities, as well.

Of particular interest was the relationship between concerns about crime and other problems in the community. Increasing crime and the relationship between drug and alcohol abuse and crime were problematic in both towns, but especially in Greenhills. Although a greater proportion of respondents in Greenhills than in Hillnest believed divisions, as a consequence of ethnic tension among people in the community was a problem (Table 2), it was considered a minor issue in both communities in the multi-dimensional scaling.

The survey indicated that lack of privacy, a common complaint in small communities, was a minor problem in both towns. Since lack of privacy, along with unemployment and poor local economy, were criticised in both communities, they do not differentiate levels of crime. Hillnest, the town closer to the sociological “ideal” of community, exhibited a greater number of strengths related to personal satisfaction that act as a buffer against economic problems. Residents in Greenhills found it more difficult to identify many strong positive

qualities. Although Greenhills had wonderful external qualities, such as environment and lifestyle, it lacked the essential personal qualities, especially trust, friendliness, and family values that made Hillnest a socially supportive community. Those personal qualities are indicative of social cohesion and integration and are the foundation for low crime in a community.

Results of the Interviews and Focus Groups

Perceptions of the community

The findings from the participants to the key informant interviews and focus groups were similar to those of the mail survey, and serve to reinforce differences between Hillnest and Greenhills. Participants from both communities appreciated their rural lifestyle and environment. They were also well satisfied with the services available in the towns. As one retired teacher noted: “Hillnest is small, accessible and familiar. I know everyone, there’s lots to do, I can get most things here or I can go to (nearby regional city) if necessary. There is an excellent hospital and ambulance service”.

The focus groups and personal interviews made it clear that respondents were referring to different dimensions in their perceptions of community. While the generosity, humanism and commitment of many residents were evident in both communities, Hillnest more closely resembled the sociological ideal of “community”. Personal qualities, such as community spirit, family values, friendliness, informality and trust, were valued by residents. One noted: “When new people come to town, neighbours come over with cakes and food and help them move in. I had hesitated about moving here but people were so good to me and I loved it”. Hillnest residents praised the rich and continuing involvement in a variety of voluntary and involuntary organisations including churches, schools, sports clubs and police youth clubs that work exceptionally well together. Several participants stressed the excellent relationship between the Aboriginal community and the wider community. To quote the retired manager of a Hillnest business: “People support each other. There is a great mix of people – the Aboriginals are good community members”. Although respondents from Greenhills also spoke positively about the friendliness of the community and support for clubs and organisations, there was recognition of the community’s differentiation. Participants identified several different groups within the community. One described: “There are communities within communities: those who seek an alternate lifestyle in the hills, four or more Aboriginal groups, the Irish/Catholic farmers who are not wealthy but have been here a

long time, retirees and the Blowins – what locals call the professional people”. Several residents noted the division between these different groups.

Compared to Hillnest, Greenhills had a larger heterogeneous population that had established more diverse and complex norms and styles of life. A prevailing view was represented by the comment of a therapist who described Greenhills as a place where: “Professional people find it easier to be a part of the community because they have a job and can join the professional community. Those who are unemployed and move to be near the beaches find it more difficult”. A member of the clergy described Greenhills’ residents as: “Friendly country people but there is a bad element. Lower socio-economic groups move to town and live on the dole. New Aboriginal families are moving in, but they are not attached locally”. An editor described the Aboriginal population as: “A distinct group but they are also fragmented” and that “Business groups operate independently on each other – there are uptown and downtown businesses”.

Both towns had established expectations concerning newcomers. Hillnest expected newcomers to join social groups and to be involved in community activities. Newcomers there were intensely scrutinised and expected to participate and to conform to community norms. In Greenhills, one participant saw the community as friendly but acknowledged there were obvious cliques. As another stated: “Some newcomers get opposition if they try to change things as soon as they arrive. If they accept local standards and don’t expect city standards, they will fit in”.

Unemployment and economic decline were nearly universal concerns in both communities. As one Hillnest resident stated: “The community is not as wealthy as it used to be. There is unemployment, economic decline, and people leaving the district”. In Greenhills, participants were concerned about the ongoing loss of services and industries from the district because it exacerbated the unemployment situation. One noted the poverty associated with unemployment: “Poverty is a big problem – there are lots of people in need”.

In both communities, unemployment and its associated boredom, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, family breakdown and poor parenting were perceived to have serious ramifications for the younger generation. One Hillnest participant commented: “It’s hard to get kids to say no to drugs and alcohol when they go home to see their parents aren’t saying no”. Drug abuse was of particular concern. A majority of participants believed drugs were a primary cause of much local theft. The findings resembled observations in the United States that rural people believed alcohol abuse, increasing crime, increasing drug use, loss of family farms, and lack of jobs to be the five greatest threats to rural America (Hobbs, 1995).

Crime

Crime was less of a concern than unemployment and economic decline for residents in both communities. Nevertheless, crime was a more serious concern in Greenhills. Furthermore, in Greenhills, local crime was perceived as comparatively more serious than in other towns. There were several types of crimes considered to be major problems particularly, illegal drug use, petty theft and domestic violence. One interviewee described Greenhills as a place with: “Heroin and purse-snatching and assaults of old people”. Of those interviewed, 80% had been a victim of crime.

The reverse was true in Hillnest. Participants described most crimes as only a minor problem. Vandalism and break and enters were the main concerns. One service provider observed that when crime occurs, local people react. For example, residents were outraged when trees were removed by vandals. Compared to serious crimes elsewhere, such incidents are relatively benign. A town constable mentioned that: “There was an aggravated break and enter about two weeks ago, which is out of the norm”. The person arrested for the crime was described as: “An old timer alcoholic”. Another Hillnest resident noted that: “Until recently, Hillnest had the lowest crime in the State” (of New South Wales).

Differences between the two communities were also found through their sources of information about crime. In Greenhills, key informants indicated that citizens relied mostly on newspapers and people at work. In Hillnest, key informants said that citizens consult their friends, as well as newspapers, television and radio.

Throughout this study, discussions in Greenhills usually focused on why there was so much crime, while in Hillnest, they focused on why there was so little crime in comparison to other communities. Drug crimes and breaking and entering were particular concerns in both communities, while all thefts bothered residents in Greenhills. Increased drug use among young people, the increasing availability of hard drugs, and the perceived inability to detain drug dealers were common concerns during interviews and focus groups. Participants believed that break and enter offences and petty thefts were increasingly widespread, especially in Greenhills. Under reporting of crimes was a common complaint among police in Greenhills. Some participants believed reporting was a waste of time. One stated: “People despair about calling the police. Nothing is done”. Another added: “Juveniles are termed ‘mischievous’. The law-makers are not seeing crime as the community sees it”.

Participants from both communities believed that most crime was committed by a small proportion of the population, who despite (and perhaps because of) decriminalisation,

diversion, multiple cautions and eventual institutionalisation, continued to violate the law. Those interviewed in both communities identified groups linked to crime. In Greenhills, lower socio-economic Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples were frequently blamed. As one Greenhills resident described: “There are a number of groups in town and there are a couple of bad apples who have no respect for the community and effect the reputation of the whole Aboriginal community”. Another added: “There is a tendency to blame Aboriginal people for all crime but lower class whites are also a problem”. In contrast, most of those interviewed in Hillnest believed that the main perpetrators of crime were outsiders who came to town. One Hillnest resident, reflecting the opinion of many others in town, stated that: “There are only about five troublemakers in town. When they are in jail or are kicked out of town, the crime rate drops. Some are locals, others drift from other communities”.

Unemployment and associated poverty, drug and alcohol abuse were universally identified as the social causes of crime. The focus groups and interviewees in Greenhills and Hillnest iterated that economic issues were fundamental and that crime and other social problems derived directly from economic conditions. They believed that loss of government services, such as health, transportation, education, and police, led to smaller populations, less employment and, consequently, crime. One Greenhills participant explained: “Government agencies have left which adds to the loss of jobs. Kids have to leave town to seek employment. Then non-locals move in and often they are unemployed and drug abusers which adds to the problem”. The focus groups and interviewees in Hillnest believed that community was intact and cohesive, and that problems emanated from outside. As one Hillnest official put it: “Aboriginal families that come in and cause trouble get shown the door very quickly”. In contrast, in Greenhills, most attention among Aborigines and non-Aborigines was upon what had caused the fragmentation, and upon attempts to counter it.

The Thomas’ Theorem, the foundation of the Labelling Perspective (Becker, 1963), maintains that such perceptions, whether structurally present or not, produce real consequences (i.e., “If men [*sic*] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences”). Braithwaite (1989) emphasises the dangers of stigmatisation. If members of a community believe that increased crime and drug and alcohol abuse threaten their community, they may respond by further dividing their communities into “good people” and “those other people”. Community members who stigmatise in this manner devalue other people in the community and expect outside programs to solve local problems, a phenomena common to rural communities in the United States and other countries as well (Hobbs, 1994; Strang and Braithwaite, 2001). Labels diminish the sense of aims toward a synthesis for what

constitutes the good society. The civil responsibility that he later developed in his work with Petit (1990) provides a template through which residents in a society could become engaged, as if they lived in communities. This hope is implied in his description of how reintegrative shaming should operate. When community members consider the causes to lie outside the community, they are likely to do nothing (Braithwaite and Petit, 1990; Hobbs, 1994; Strang and Braithwaite, 2001).

The interviews and focus groups were rich sources of information regarding troublemakers, stigma and sanctioning. Many participants in the key informant and focus group interviews from both Hillnest and Greenhills pointed the finger of blame at “them”, identifiable groups within the community. Many Greenhills’ participants believed Aboriginal people were disproportionately responsible for crime, though service providers indicated this was exaggerated. A redeeming feature of these communities, especially Greenhills, was that there were many concerned service providers and community leaders who viewed crime as a problem of the whole community and who were attempting to implement community-wide initiatives.

In contrast to Greenhills, control over crime in Hillnest was maintained through strong social controls and social cohesion that the Aboriginal community itself adopted and imposed. This unity of opinion and lifestyle, and a common belief in the successful accommodation between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, established the ideal of ‘community’ for Hillnest and provided the power to impose social controls. As a place where everyone knows everyone else, deviant behaviour was quickly identified and was not tolerated. Newcomers to Hillnest were accepted into the community only if they conformed to established standards. As one resident explained: “The local Aboriginal community and the Elders use threats and promises and in three to four days they (the troublemakers) are gone. If they do the right thing they are left alone. The local police and authorities tend to turn a blind eye to the tactics”.

Similar to Chantrill’s (1999) observations in a remote rural Aboriginal community where deviant adolescents were required to answer to the Elders, incoming Aboriginal families in Hillnest were pressured to conform or leave. The humiliation resulted in, either desired behaviour change or exclusion, a practice that exemplifies Braithwaite’s concept of reintegrative shaming where:

... deterrence is not the severity of the sanction but its social embeddedness: shame is more deterring when it is administered by persons who continue to be of importance to us.

Braithwaite (1989, p.55)

Successful integration of Aboriginal People in Hillnest occurred largely because they had been established for over a hundred years in the region and were strongly attached to the place. Aboriginal residents manifested what are commonly perceived to be white mainstream societal values. They were extremely proud that six of their children were completing their final year of high school. They were pleased that there were several mixed race couples in the town. They strongly objected to being victims of crime, and were aware of general perceptions that Aboriginal people disproportionately account for crime. They pressured troublemakers to conform. As one Aboriginal Elder in Hillnest explained: “Newcomers have to fit in. People resent outsiders if they do not maintain the standards set down by the community. Two families in town were causing trouble and what happens is that all Aboriginal people are blamed”.

Greenhills experienced more difficulty in controlling crime because it lacked such unity of norms and the capacity to impose informal sanctions. In addition to the non-Aboriginal community, Greenhills had segmented Aboriginal populations, some who were the traditional owners of the land and others who had come from other parts of Australia. The displacement of families, confrontation with different values and competing claims to the area, have created tension in Greenhills. Greenhills lacked cohesion between groups and consensus regarding acceptable social behaviour. Some groups perceived that they were marginalised and excluded from the wider community. Peer pressure to be in juxtaposition with societal norms was common among juveniles, creating a self fulfilling prophesy of deviance (Becker, 1963). Concerned Elders wanted conformity and were seeking better relations with the white community. Likewise, many non-Aboriginal community residents were genuinely interested in uniting to overcome local problems. However, since they lacked a homogenous social structure and agreement on social norms, they were unable to effectively impose informal sanctions against troublemakers and to reintegrate them into the community.

Safety and security

There was common consensus from key informants and focus group participants that the responsibility for personal and property safety and security was largely the responsibility of the individual. Most people diligently secured their properties if they were away for any length of time, by ensuring neighbours watched over their homes. Although people in Greenhills were very aware of crime and took steps to ensure their personal safety and security, they had no great fear of crime. Except for one victim of harassment, most felt safe

in the daytime though parts of town were believed to be sufficiently dangerous to be avoided at night.

Hillnest residents were very concerned about the increasing incidence of crime in their community. Although crime was not perceived to be serious, residents vigilantly secured their premises. Traditional values; caution, prudence, and responsibility provided their motivation rather than actual fear of crime. As one Hillnester saw it: “Everyone knows everyone else so it’s easy to recognise a stranger which makes it easy to identify troublemakers and solve more crime”. Few people worried about the safety of their family in either community. Neighbourhood Watch was generally perceived as an excellent idea in principle, but irrelevant in both Greenhills and Hillnest. “Neighbourhood Watch happens naturally,” was a frequent comment. A common sentiment was that watch groups were ineffective because they were monopolised by local cliques with agendas other than community safety. One resident in Greenhill lamented: “Neighbourhood Watch would be effective but you need the right people involved. Often the people in charge are very controlling which puts others off”.

Attitudes toward police and policing were very different between the communities. Most respondents from both communities wanted to see police patrolling the streets more often. As one Greenhills informant explained: “The police are under-resourced. With officers on sick leave or annual leave, there are never enough. Therefore it’s easier for officers to cover areas in vehicles. While the need for the police to be seen is important – it’s just not possible”. In Hillnest, lack of resources was recognised as an issue with police effectiveness, but at the same time: “The police know everyone so there is a faster clean up of crime because they know the offenders”.

A majority of residents in both communities were satisfied that the police were doing a good job, though residents in Greenhills believed that staffing levels were too low and that crime was not under control. Hillnest residents were satisfied both with current staffing levels and that crime was under control.

Regret was expressed about the current trend to limit tours of duty for rural officers. The interviews substantiated recent observations by Jobes (2002) that residents wanted local officers to live in the community long enough to get to know and trust them. To effectively police the community and gain local confidence, officers need to make themselves available when required, as observed by Weisheit, Falcone and Wells (1999). Within Hillnest, people felt frustrated because sometimes they were unable to make face-to-face contact with their local police. Calls to police were directed through regional centres. People felt uneasy about

slower service provision and delays in the event of serious emergencies. One dissatisfied Hillnest resident reported: “You get put through to the regional centre. I put in a call one night when I saw a woman in danger and it took 40 minutes for the police to arrive and the police station is in the next block”. In Greenhills, the issue was expressed more in terms of divisions: “Police response time is too slow in an emergency. If Aboriginals are involved, they take even longer to respond – because it’s dangerous”. However, overall, both Hillnest and Greenhill respondents believed that while they were under resourced, the police were doing the best job possible.

Community solutions

Both communities had developed strategies, initiatives and programs to meet their particular social welfare needs and to respond to crime. In Greenhills, community organisations controlled and developed by the Aboriginal Community appeared to facilitate successful service provision to Aboriginal People. The Greenhills Assistance Patrol provided assistance to young children and others at risk of being on the streets late at night. It was an effort that one Greenhills Council member said was a case of: “The Aboriginal community putting in most of the effort into the Greenhills Patrol Van even though the service is designed for the whole community. The Aboriginal community will take people in who are in trouble or homeless”. The Greenhills community had established a disadvantaged youth driver program based on the premise that obtaining a driver’s licence increases self-esteem and employment opportunities for youth. They had created outdoor spaces for local artists to dissuade graffiti vandals and had developed a community crime prevention plan in collaboration with the New South Wales Attorney General’s Department. Through broad community consultations, the range of crime issues of concern to the local community were identified and prioritised, and a Crime Profile Report (CPR) for each issue was developed (Shipway and Homel, 1999).

Hillnest had far fewer bureaucratised programs and initiatives. Hillnesters considered their Police Citizen’s Youth Club a very successful and necessary service to provide activities for young people. An Elder with the Aboriginal community reported that: “The Aboriginal community has formed a liaison with police in Hillnest and (a nearby town) to work together on solutions. This is the only Aboriginal community with such a treaty – it allows police into the community”. However, as mentioned above, the Aboriginal Elders were allowed to address people creating problems in their own way. It was evident that the most effective supports in Hillnest were informal interactions spread throughout churches, schools,

neighbourhoods and clubs. As one Hillnest official put it: “Troublemakers in pubs are banned from all clubs and hotels in town if they are banned from one”. They in effect prevented the need for reactive initiatives created by communities, like Greenhills, to respond to problems after they had already become established.

DISCUSSION

The general theoretical object of this paper was to examine how levels of cohesiveness and integration, the bedrocks of organised civic-minded communities affect the way communities respond to crime. The crucial substance of the article was to consider whether levels of cohesion and integration affect levels of crime in communities with high proportions of Aboriginal People. Knowing how perceptions are related to underlying community structures creates a foundation for understanding how communities respond to such issues. Braithwaite (1989) and associates (Braithwaite and Petit, 1990; Strang and Braithwaite, 2001) presented reintegrative shaming as a method that communities should use to respond to criminals. Braithwaite and Petit simultaneously developed a general theory of crime; an inclusive, multi-dimensional and global statement of the relationship between social organisation, civic responsibility and crime.

This paper examined two rural communities with high proportions of Aboriginal people. In Greenhills, representatives of the Aboriginal community were defensive and sensitive about the accusations of criminal behaviour among their people. Although institutional spokespersons emphasised that single-minded blaming exaggerated the commission of local crimes by Aborigines, many Greenhill residents believed Aboriginal children were frequently out of control. The Greenhills community suffered from social disorganisation. Aboriginal People in Greenhills came from several areas, but only one group comprised the traditional owners of the land. Intra-ethnic animosity occurred between Aboriginal groups in addition to inter-ethnic strains between Aborigines and non-Aborigines. The sensitivity in Hillnest took an entirely different tack. Respondents were proud of sports, educational and religious integration, as well as mixed marriages in their community. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of Hillnest were proud of the community’s unity and low rate of crime in comparison to other rural towns in Australia. The Aboriginal Elders were aware that Aboriginal people are often blamed for trouble in rural towns and placed considerable pressure upon their people and Aboriginal newcomers to the town to conform to

the community's standards. Most of the Hillnest Aboriginal community were the traditional owners of the land.

By comparing ethnicity and community structure, it is evident that social structure, rather than ethnic status, accounts for differences in crime in the two communities. People who lived in Hillnest, a more cohesive social structure, talked about what local residents do, usually in conjunction with local institutions. They referred to "our school", "the students", "the women at the church", though they rarely used the word "community". Reference to what characterises community is real and relatively simple. People who lived in the more migratory, fragmented and more complex, Greenhills, articulated a different vocabulary. Service providers and professionals, many of whom did not even live in Greenhills, spoke in generalising concepts that can be depersonalising in operation.

Hillnest, a more homogeneous and cohesive community, exhibited less crime and as a consequence, its residents spoke more frequently of community spirit, family, friendliness and trust. Greenhills, which was larger, more diverse, and fragmented, experienced more crime. Its residents identified programs and institutions more than personal qualities as community strengths. Residents of both towns thought unemployment and economic decline were the fundamental problems facing their communities, though no relationship between economic characteristics and crime was found in an earlier analysis of 120 rural-located Local Government Areas by Jobes *et al* (2004). This does not mean that economics is unrelated to crime. It infers that economic conditions are not directly linked to crime, but may underlie the relative cohesiveness of rural community social structures.

Residents in both communities also believed that the loss of local government services had been detrimental to families, employment opportunities, and access to services. Crime was perceived to occur as a consequence of these social problems. However, if they had been primary causes of crime, then both Hillnest and Greenhills would have had high crime. Since Hillnest did not, it is necessary to identify how the towns differed on other factors that predispose crime. Certainly the loss of people from Hillnest implied the severing of families and friendships, the loss of cohesion and close interaction. In Greenhills, the affects of in and out migration just meant a continuation of the already fragmented social system. As in other rural places, crime was generally increasing in these communities. However, their residents displayed relatively little fear of crime. Few actively guarded their personal safety though many in Hillnest secured their homes. Most were concerned that there had been a gradual erosion of the police safety net. They wanted to maintain basic services, including police, health and education.

Republican theory is based on the principle that the ideal society provides both a sense of security and freedom, in the sense of non-dominion. This ideal occurs through equal and responsive citizenship. Braithwaite initially focused on how restoration of justice might occur within the idealised community. He sought to identify how victims might be reassured and compensated for crimes committed against them and how violators might learn to acknowledge and regret the injuries they had incurred. The complexity of how this ideal could be achieved then evolved in subsequent publications. Reintegration required deep tolerance toward different cultural beliefs and actions that distinguish mainstream and disenfranchised citizens. It also required enormous patience, as Braithwaite and Mugford demonstrated in their summary of early experiments with reintegrative shaming. Delinquents sometimes continued to re-offend, despite multiple experiences in the group conferencing that was intended to convey personal acceptance and to instil a sense of shame for their violations.

Modern society tries to create solutions by consciously constructing voluntary and involuntary institutions. In the absence of a pre-existing foundation of community, consciously constructed solutions may be only marginally effective. Local schools, police, welfare and youth groups, per se, are neither the problem nor the solution. Consciously constructed help groups – for problem children, lonely newcomers, single mothers, and so forth, are only temporarily effective and for a minority, unless they are genuinely part of the community. In Greenhills and other communities where civil society is frayed, they are increasingly a veneer covering a defective structure incapable of controlling crime and deviance.

Further research

This research demonstrates the diverse nature of two rural communities with high proportions of Aboriginal people. The implications of the effects of diversity on the types of problems they experience may be profound for economic and comparative community structures of other rural areas as well as in urban areas. Social cohesion and integration consistently differentiated the communities and their levels of crime as measured by three distinct instruments. Comparative analyses of rural and urban structures are clearly called for.

Understanding crime in rural Australia requires understanding rural life as the context in which crime occurs. Some crimes are common to both rural and urban settings, but the way they occur and the way they are responded to, tend to be very different. The characteristics of rural populations, their living conditions, and their problems are distinct from urban centres and vary between rural communities. Ongoing research is vitally

important to understand crime and other social problems within the contexts of rural environments in Australia. Healthy community, real community, is a subtle, often unrecognised, structure that prevents problems through close, personal, informal interaction. People in healthy real communities share common values and are continually watching, communicating and responding to each other, distinguishing the socially acceptable from the socially unacceptable. These qualities are the context in which the formal service structures; schools, police, welfare, youth groups and so forth operate. They, rather than such service institutions and voluntary associations, are why Hillnest has had low levels of crime and other social problems for many years.

Restorative justice in the form of reintegrative shaming is an ideal that becomes increasingly difficult to achieve as the level of community disorganisation increases. In cohesive communities like Hillnest, reintegration occurs as a consequence of existing integration. In socially disorganised communities, and Greenhills is not an extreme example, reintegration is very difficult.

Endnotes

*** References using the actual community names are available from the authors on request.**

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Table 1: Social and crime characteristics of Greenhills and Hillnest

| Social Characteristics | Greenhills | Hillnest |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|
| Population | 26430 | 4872 |
| Average growth | 0.86 | -1.45 |
| In migration | 4381 (16.58%) | 764 (15.68%) |
| Aboriginal population | 1793 (6.78%) | 309 (6.34%) |
| Overseas born | 1709 (6.47%) | 191 (3.92%) |
| Median age | 37 | 37 |
| Median individual income | 180 | 250 |
| Median household income | 400 | 400 |
| Unemployment rate | 19.56 | 8.08 |
| People married | 10977 (41.5%) | 2223 (45.6%) |
| Sole parents | 3226 (12.2%) | 477 (9.79%) |
| Crime Characteristics: 4-year average – 1996 – 1999 (per 100,000 population) | | |
| Assault | 1346 | 416 |
| Break & Enter | 1904 | 561 |
| Motor Vehicle Theft | 447 | 66 |
| Malicious Damage | 1734 | 513 |
| Drug Offences | 595 | 383 |

Table 2: Perceived community strengths and community problems
(Scores were 3=Major strength/problem; 2=Minor strength/problem; 1=Not a strength/problem)

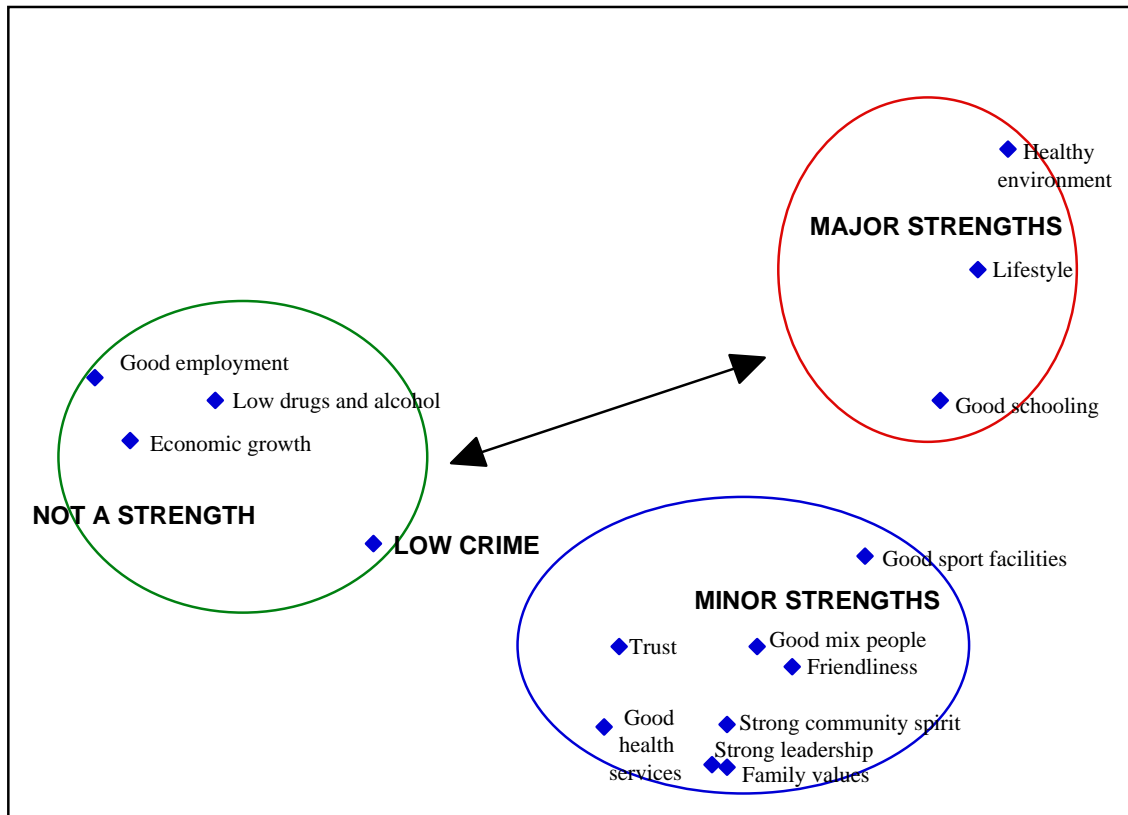
| Community Strengths | Greenhills (n=46) | | Hillnest (n=46) | |
|--|-------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| A great lifestyle. | 2.61 | .62 | 2.4 | .72 |
| Plenty of good employment opportunities. | 1.07 | .26 | 1.21 | .47 |
| Strong economic growth. | 1.13 | .34 | 1.42 | .62 |
| Traditional family and religious values. | 1.93 | .63 | 2.24 | .65 |
| Very little drug and/or alcohol abuse. | 1.30 | .63 | 2.02 | .72 |
| Very little crime: a fairly safe community | 1.48 | .66 | 2.27 | .72 |
| Good sport, recreational, social opportunities. | 2.27 | .69 | 2.39 | .65 |
| Good schools. | 2.47 | .66 | 2.57 | .69 |
| Good health and welfare services. | 1.76 | .65 | 2.52 | .69 |
| A healthy natural environment. | 2.71 | .59 | 2.76 | .52 |
| Strong effective community leadership. | 1.91 | .63 | 2.18 | .65 |
| Strong community spirit | 1.95 | .65 | 2.18 | .68 |
| An interesting mix of people | 2.04 | .71 | 2.2 | .62 |
| Friendliness: Everyone knows each other. | 2.09 | .68 | 2.49 | .59 |
| Most people in this community can be trusted. | 1.82 | .72 | 2.41 | .65 |
| Community Problems | | | | |
| People leaving the district. | 2.44 | .62 | 2.39 | .65 |
| A lack of jobs. | 2.94 | .25 | 2.83 | .49 |
| Economic decline. | 2.8 | .41 | 2.64 | .57 |
| Family breakdown. | 2.5 | .66 | 2.18 | .75 |
| Drug and/or alcohol abuse. | 2.83 | .38 | 2.26 | .65 |
| An increasing crime rate | 2.62 | .54 | 2.44 | .66 |
| Poor sport, recreational, social or cultural opportunities | 1.44 | .66 | 1.52 | .75 |
| Inadequate schools. | 1.4 | .65 | 1.33 | .64 |
| Inadequate health and welfare services. | 2.11 | .80 | 1.52 | .75 |
| Environmental deterioration and hazards. | 1.6 | .63 | 1.58 | .70 |
| Poor community leadership. | 1.89 | .75 | 1.69 | .70 |
| A lack of community spirit: no cooperation. | 1.93 | .66 | 1.71 | .59 |
| Too many different groups within the community/division | 2.02 | .81 | 1.59 | .69 |
| No privacy: everyone knows everyone else's business. | 1.71 | .73 | 1.83 | .74 |
| A breakdown in trust | 2.09 | .77 | 1.85 | .67 |

Table 3: Topics covered during personal interviews and focus groups

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community strengths and problems. • Community spirit. • How easy it was for newcomers to be accepted into the community. • Neighbourhood Watch. • Participant's level of involvement in the community. |
| Crime | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The perceived incidence of a range of crime types and social problems. • The perceived source of blame for crime in the community. • How serious crime was in the community. • Whether the amount of crime in the community had increased or decreased over the past year. • How serious crime was compared to other rural areas in NSW. • Whether there had been any change in the types of crime that occurs. |
| Policing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The perceived level of police presence in the community. • Whether there were too many or too few police in the community. • Whether the police were doing a good job. • Whether the police had the crime problem in the community under control. • Whether there was much respect for police in the community. |
| Safety and Security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How safe participants felt in their community during the day and after dark. • Whether there were any unsafe areas in town. • How concerned participants were about the safety of their family members. • What precautions participants took for their personal safety and for the security of their possessions. • Where they received information on crime. |
| Solutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether there had been any shift in the attitude of local people towards the problems of crime. • Whether there were any community groups developed for local people to help themselves deal with the problem of crime. • Whether participants had any thoughts or suggestions for reducing the level of crime in their area. |
| Values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policing. • Drug laws. • Criminal Justice. • Social Justice. • Community responsibility. • Family responsibility. |

Figure 1: Map of Community strengths for Greenhills and Hillnest

Greenhills



Hillnest

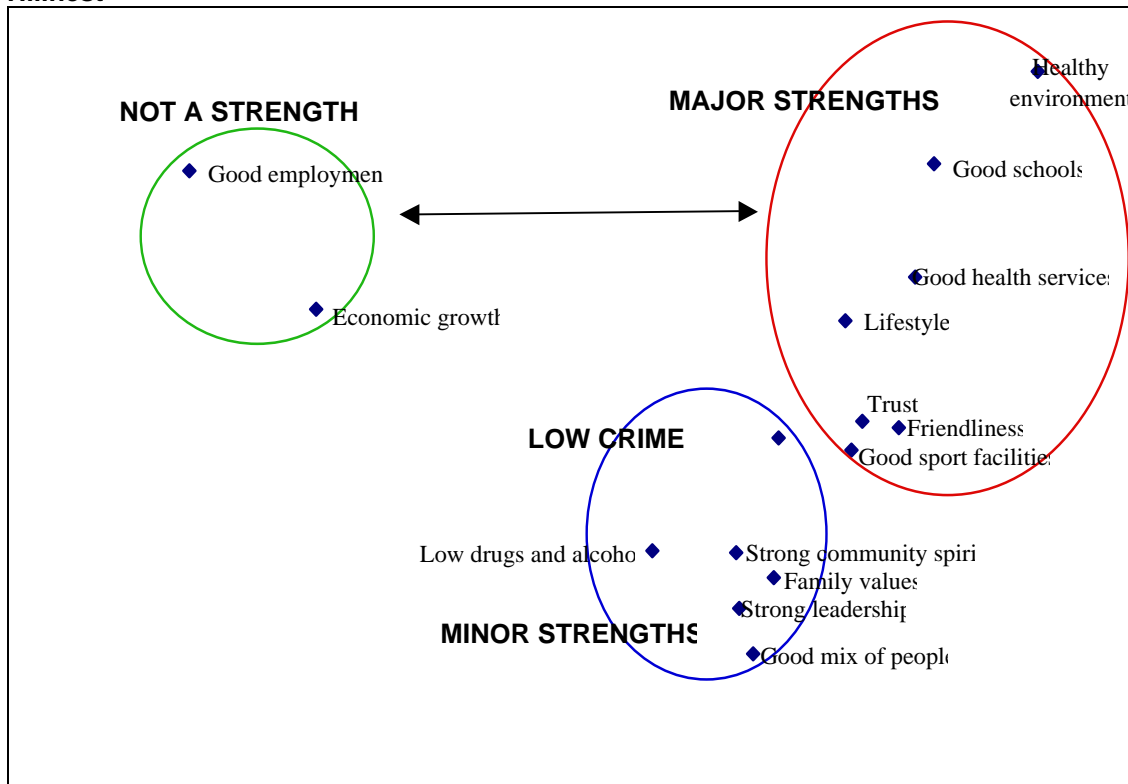
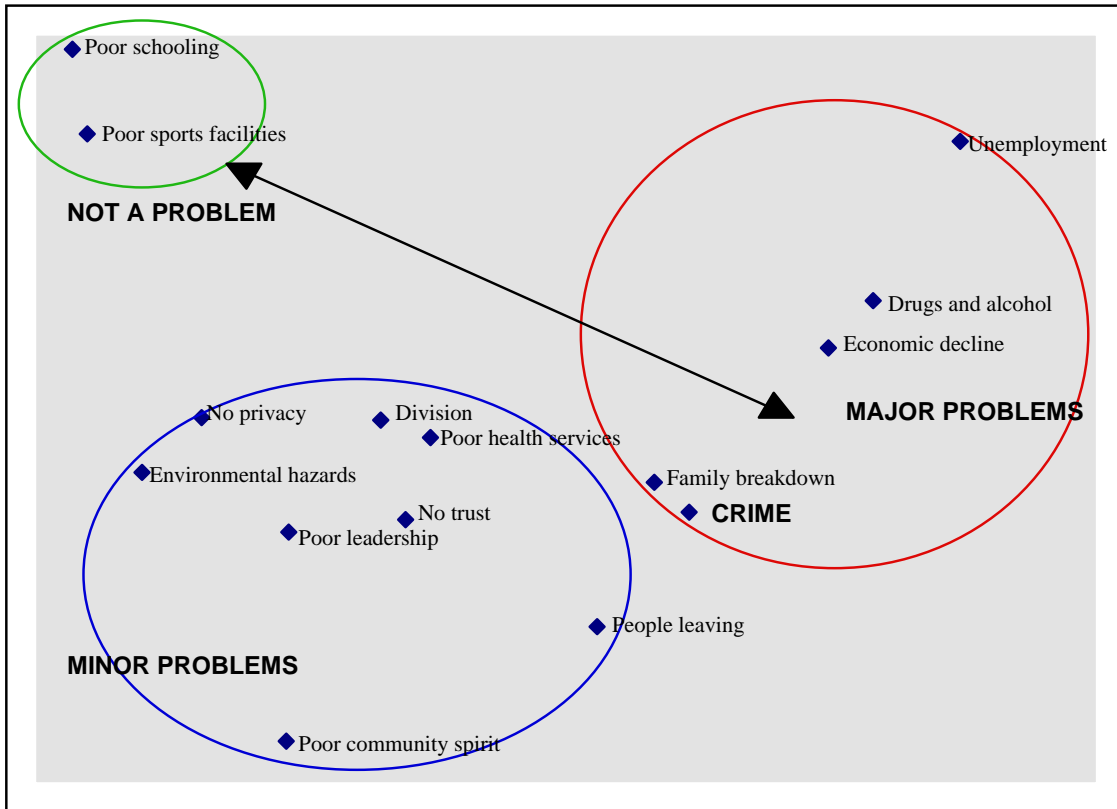


Figure 2: Map of Community Problems for Greenhills and Hillnest

Greenhills



Hillnest

