

Research brief No. 4, January 2026

Community views on the importance of sentencing purposes

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OVERVIEW

AIM This research explores how Queenslanders view the purposes of sentencing and the factors that influence their priorities. Sentencing in Queensland is guided by five key purposes: punishment, rehabilitation, deterrence, denunciation, and community protection.¹ Courts must balance these purposes when determining an appropriate sentence.

The aim of this research is to understand which sentencing purposes Queenslanders consider most important and to identify the factors shaping these views. The research examines how community perspectives vary based on the type of offence and whether the offender is a repeat offender.

METHOD Focus groups were held in 3 locations in South-East Queensland, regional Queensland, and remote Queensland (Brisbane, Townsville, and Mount Isa). A total of 8 focus groups were held: 4 in Brisbane, and 2 each in Townsville and Mount Isa. Each session lasted 2 hours and included up to 10 participants, with a total of 66 participants involved. The fieldwork was conducted in June 2022.

Participants completed structured activities, including ranking the importance of sentencing purposes both in general and across six offence scenarios. These scenarios varied by offence type—drug possession, assault causing injury, and home burglary—and by offender status, distinguishing between first-time and repeat offenders. Group discussions and written responses captured participants' reasoning and perspectives on sentencing purposes.

RESULTS Community views on the purposes of sentencing were diverse and shaped by a range of factors. Participants' rankings varied depending on the type of offence, whether the offender was a repeat offender, and contextual considerations such as the level of harm caused and the perceived wrongness of the behaviour.

Punishment and community protection were the most commonly prioritised sentencing purposes overall. However, the type of offence influenced participants' views, with drug possession associated with rehabilitation, assault with punishment and denunciation, and burglary with punishment and community protection. Deterrence was viewed as important for all first-time offenders, regardless of the type of offence.

Repeat offending had a considerable impact, consistently shifting priorities towards punishment and community protection, often overriding differences by offence type.

Participants considered a range of contextual factors when weighing up the importance of sentencing purposes. The main factors included the perceived risk of harm posed by the offence and whether the offence was clearly and deliberately committed in violation of societal norms. A small number of participants considered it important to address the underlying causes of offending behaviour, although others did not see this as necessarily being something that could be effectively addressed through sentencing.

CONCLUSION This research demonstrates that community views on the purposes of sentencing are shaped by several interconnected factors. As with previous research, the findings reveal that public attitudes are not fixed but shift depending on the contextual considerations of each case.

¹ From 1 November 2025, a new sentencing purpose was introduced to recognise the harm done by the offender to a victim of the offence. This purpose was not in effect at the time this research was undertaken. *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992* (Qld) s 9(1)(ca) ('PSA').

INTRODUCTION

In Queensland, there are only five purposes for which a court can impose a sentence.² These are:

- **Punishment** – to punish the person in a way that is just (fair).
- **Rehabilitation** – to help a person change their behaviour so they don't commit an offence again.
- **Deterrence** – to discourage that person and other people from committing the same type of offence by showing them what might happen if they do.
- **Denunciation** – to express in a formal public way that the person's behaviour is unacceptable to the community.
- **Protection** – to keep the community safe.

An additional purpose of sentencing was introduced from 1 November 2025 to recognise the harm done by the offender to a victim of the offence. This purpose was not in effect at the time this research was undertaken.

A sentencing judge or magistrate may impose a sentence for any one of these reasons, or for any combination of two or more reasons for which a sentence may be imposed.³ The purpose of any given sentence will vary from case to case as the court will consider how much weight should be given to each purpose depending on the individual circumstances.

The purposes of sentencing often overlap and can't be considered in isolation. The court must balance these purposes to arrive at an appropriate sentence, even though the different purposes may sometimes point in different directions.⁴

Previous research on sentencing purposes generally

This study explores how the public prioritises the importance of each sentencing purpose.

Punishment, deterrence, and community protection are often identified as the most important sentencing purposes by the public,⁵ who believe judges should reflect public opinion and expectations when handing down sentences.⁶ Research interviews with judges have indicated that there is general agreement that it is proper to take into account an informed public opinion when sentencing.⁷

The notion of informed public opinion about the purposes of sentencing has been explored by academics across Australia. Studies typically find that members of the public have a limited understanding of the sentencing purposes, most often focusing on the principles of punishment or rehabilitation, depending on the offence and offender characteristics.

Several studies have explored the public's understanding of the purposes of sentencing, assessed the general sense of confidence in sentencing, and identified factors influencing how people prioritise the importance of each purpose.⁸ Findings in Australia have shown low confidence in the courts from the public, who feel that sentences lack appropriateness and are too lenient.⁹ These views contribute to a sense that the judiciary are out of touch with the views of the general public. Taking into account the views of the public around sentencing can increase the legitimacy of the law.¹⁰

Research by the University of the Sunshine Coast showed that punishment was the preferred sentencing purpose in cases involving identified vulnerabilities in the victim-survivor or the wider community.¹¹ Community members typically associate punishment with imprisonment, and

² Ibid s 9(1).

³ Ibid s 9(1)(f).

⁴ *Veen v The Queen (No 2)* (1988) 164 CLR 465, 476 (Mason CJ, Brennan, Dawson and Toohey JJ).

⁵ Karen Gelb, *Purposes of Sentencing: Community Views in Victoria* (Sentencing Matters, Sentencing Advisory Council (Vic), July 2011) 19; Julian Roberts and Mike Hough, 'Sentencing Young Offenders: Public Opinion in England and Wales' (2005) 5(3) *Criminal Justice* 211, 216.

⁶ Geraldine Mackenzie et al, 'Sentencing and Public Confidence: Results from a National Australian Survey on Public Opinions towards Sentencing' (2012) 45(1) *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 45.

⁷ Chief Justice Murray Gleeson, 'Out of Touch or out of Reach?' (Keynote Address at the Judicial Conference of Australia Colloquium, Adelaide, 2 October 2004); Geraldine Mackenzie, *How Judges Sentence* (Federation Press, 2005).

⁸ Chief Justice Murray Gleeson (n 7) 6–7; Laura Hilderley et al, *Sentencing for Child Homicide Offences: Assessing Public Opinion Using a Focus Group Approach* (Research Report No 21, Australian Institute of Criminology, 1 June 2021); Amy Kirby and Jessica Jacobson, 'Public Attitudes to the Sentencing of Drug Offences' (2014) 14(3) *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 334; Caroline A Spiranovic et al, 'Public Preferences for Sentencing Purposes: What Difference Does Offender Age, Criminal History and Offence Type Make?' (2012) 12(3) *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 289 ('Public Preferences for Sentencing Purposes').

⁹ Mackenzie et al (n 6) 12; Elizabeth Moore, *Public Confidence in the New South Wales Criminal Justice System: 2019 Update* (No 227, Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (NSW), 28 July 2020) 21.

¹⁰ Kate Warner et al, 'Why Sentence? Comparing the Views of Jurors, Judges and the Legislature on the Purposes of Sentencing in Victoria, Australia' (2019) 19(1) *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 26, 2.

¹¹ Dominique Moritz, Ashley Pearson and Dale Mitchell, *Community Views on Rape and Sexual Assault Sentencing* (Final Report, Sexual Violence Research and Prevention Unit, University of the Sunshine Coast, June 2024) 25.

where sexual assault and rape offences were seen as causing long-term injury to the victim-survivor, this sentencing purpose was considered justified. The study also revealed strong public support for punishment, particularly through imprisonment, for repeat offenders and individuals convicted of child sexual offences.¹²

A series of studies, known collectively as the 'Jury Studies,' were conducted in Tasmania, Victoria, and Australia-wide. These studies asked jury members who had been involved in a real criminal trial for their opinions on sentencing.

The Victorian Jury Study¹³ was conducted between May 2013 and July 2014 and involved 987 jurors from 124 trials. The purpose of the study was to explore jurors' attitudes towards sentencing and identify differences between judges and jurors when it came to sentencing severity. In order to obtain jury member views, they were issued with a survey asking them to nominate an appropriate sentence immediately following a guilty verdict, before being asked to identify what they believed was the single most important sentencing purpose in the circumstances. A sample of jurors were later selected to be interviewed about their choice of sentence, the most important sentencing purpose identified, and their reaction to the judge's sentencing remarks (including the final sentence). To understand the weight given by judges to the sentencing purposes, sentencing remarks were analysed and, where multiple purposes were mentioned, these were coded as very important, important, of some weight, or of little weight, based on the context. The authors concluded that judges and jurors often differ in their views on sentencing purposes. Judges overwhelmingly prefer general deterrence, while jurors tend to rate this as the least preferred purpose.¹⁴

Community knowledge about and understanding of sentencing

A previous paper by the Council examining community understanding of sentencing found that while members of the public tended to be confident in their understanding of sentencing terms, they may not understand the precise meaning of these terms. For example, many demonstrated a basic understanding of the term 'sentencing'; however, most equated it with punishment, and in particular sentences of imprisonment.¹⁵

Without an adequate understanding of legal terms, there is a risk that the public may form unwarranted negative opinions about sentencing. For example, the Council found that some people did not understand that a person on

parole who breaches their conditions can be returned to prison.¹⁶ Similarly, some people were not aware that a life sentence means that the person is subject to supervision and monitoring for the rest of their life, even if they are eventually released back into the community on parole.¹⁷ These examples demonstrate how the use of legal terms in sentencing may give rise to the belief that sentences are more lenient than they are in practice.

Surveys of the public consistently underestimate the proportion of people who are sentenced to custody and the length of sentences across a range of offences.¹⁸ This underestimation is the result of misinformed assumptions about how crimes are defined and also demonstrates a nuanced consideration by community members about how factors like mental health might be considered during proceedings.¹⁹

Community views about sentencing purposes change depending on characteristics of the perpetrator and the type of offence

In one of the earliest studies to explore this, researchers in the UK asked participants to consider which sentencing purpose they felt was most important when dealing with a child, and which were more suited to dealing with an adult.²⁰ The authors reported having found more similarities than differences, with deterrence most important for young offenders (followed by punishment) and just deserts (punishment) the most important for adults (followed by deterrence). Rehabilitation was the third choice for both groups, but with significantly more support for young offenders compared to adults (20% and 12% respectively). These findings indicate that characteristics of the offender were considered by the public when thinking about what sentencing purpose was most appropriate.

In a study of 300 residents, the Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council found that rehabilitation was the most preferred sentencing purpose for first-time offenders, while punishment was most preferred for repeat offenders.²¹ This supported earlier studies showing that the public were considerate of demographic differences along the lines of age and offending history, for those being sentenced. The study also showed that rehabilitation was identified as the most important sentencing purpose for burglary offences, whereas punishment was seen as most important for violent offences.

Using a representative sample of adults in England and Wales, researchers sought to explore which mitigating

¹² Ibid 43.

¹³ Warner et al (n 10).

¹⁴ Ibid 29.

¹⁵ Samuel Jeffs et al, *Understanding of Sentencing: Community Knowledge of Sentencing Terms and Outcomes* (Research Brief No 3, Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council, April 2023) 8.

¹⁶ Ibid 13.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Moore (n 9) 20; Jeffs et al (n 15) 17.

¹⁹ Jeffs et al (n 15) 18.

²⁰ Roberts and Hough (n 5).

²¹ Gelb (n 5) 19.

factors the public supported when it came to sentencing²². They found that offence-related mitigations, such as being a first-time offender and playing a minor role in the crime, received public support when it came to choosing a sentencing purpose. Personal and socio-demographic factors, such as age, remorse, or experiencing child abuse, attracted little sympathy in the public's considerations on sentencing purposes. The authors concluded that the public are sensitive to differences between types of offences and the circumstances of offenders, and react thoughtfully in relation to sentencing, not simply with reflexive punitiveness.²³

Community views about sentencing purposes shift when more contextual information is provided

When provided with more contextual information, the public are generally more confident in and satisfied with sentencing procedures and appear more considered in their own sentencing choices.

A Queensland study conducted by the University of the Sunshine Coast found that contextual information about the victim and offender was influential when the purposes of sentencing were rated in importance for sexual assault and rape offences.²⁴ The study also reported that differences in how the purposes were ranked based on the information available demonstrated that consideration was given to victim vulnerability and the perceived threat to the community posed by the offender. The general participant views mirrored those of victim-survivor perspectives, promoting the adoption of more victim-centred considerations when it comes to sentencing.

Similar findings were found in a Scandinavian study which included respondents from all five countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, & Iceland).²⁵ The study showed some variation in how respondents prioritised the importance of sentencing purposes based on the level of information provided. The authors concluded that sentencing goals were multidimensional—the public wanted more than punitive outcomes—and it was important to them that victims received support and that offenders were assisted to reduce future offending.

In a nationwide study to understand sentencing preferences of the Australian public, 800 people were asked what they thought should be the most important sentencing purpose, after reading a series of crime scenarios. Respondents prioritised different sentencing purposes as important, based on available information and the characteristics of the offence. In line with other studies, rehabilitation was preferred for first-time and young offenders, or those committing less serious offences, while punishment was the preferred focus for older and repeat offenders, and those committing more serious crimes.²⁶

These findings further suggest that the context of offending is important when understanding the public's preference for sentencing purposes.

Summary

Research has shown that while the public tends to favour punishment as the main purpose of sentencing, they are also sensitive to offence and offender characteristics (such as age and prior offending history), demonstrating a reflexiveness in their attitude. Providing more information to the public allows for case-by-case differences to be explored and considered when choosing the most important sentencing purpose. Generally, serious offences, such as those involving violence or those that are sexual in nature, elicit more punitive sentencing attitudes that would be associated with a focus on punishment. In contrast, non-violent offences such as property and drug crimes garner more lenient sentencing views.

This research brief reports on research which examines how the public prioritises sentencing purposes in terms of importance in a general sense, and when provided information about three different offences for a first-time offender and a repeat offender. The research utilises focus group data collected from community members in three locations across Queensland.

Research questions

This *Research Brief* explores how Queenslanders view the purposes of sentencing and the factors influencing their priorities. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) What purposes of sentencing are seen as the most important by Queenslanders?
- 2) What factors do members of the public consider when assessing the importance of each sentencing purpose?
- 3) Do community views on the importance of sentencing purposes change based on the type of offence or whether the sentenced person is a repeat offender?

²² Julian V Roberts and Mike Hough, 'Custody or Community? Exploring the Boundaries of Public Punitiveness in England and Wales' (2011) 11(2) *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 181.

²³ Ibid 195.

²⁴ Moritz, Pearson and Mitchell (n 11) 25.

²⁵ Flemming Balvig et al, 'The Public Sense of Justice in Scandinavia: A Study of Attitudes towards Punishments' (2015) 12(3) *European Journal of Criminology* 342.

²⁶ Ibid 301.

Focus Groups

The Council adopted a focus group method for this research. The primary advantage of this approach is that it elicits far more detailed, thoughtful, and insightful responses than traditional surveys, which is particularly useful when exploring opinions on a specific topic such as sentencing. Focus groups provide rich information about the personal attitudes of participants and the ability to gauge participants' understanding of sentencing concepts in a more in-depth way than is possible through a survey-based approach.

Participants

The sample selected for this study was not a random sample nor designed to be representative of the Queensland population. However, Table 1 outlines the demographics of focus group participants and alignment to the general Queensland population based on the 2021 Census. Focus group participants were older compared to the general population, with fewer participants in the 18 to 34-year-old age group, and more participants in the 55 to 75-year-old age group. Participants had a higher level of education and were less likely to be formally employed compared to all Queenslanders.

Participants were recruited by an independent market research company. The sampling frame included a diverse range of ages (with no participants under 18), an approximately even gender balance, a range of occupational statuses, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and at least one participant per location who identified as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

Three sites were selected, representing South-East Queensland (Brisbane), regional Queensland (Townsville), and remote Queensland (Mount Isa). In total, 8 focus groups were held, with 4 in Brisbane and 2 each in Townsville and Mount Isa. Each session involved up to 10 participants. The focus groups were held between 13 and 22 June 2022. Participants were compensated for their participation.

In total, 66 members of the public participated. The majority of participants lived in Brisbane (n=35), and there was a relatively even split of male and female participants (n=31 and n=35 respectively). Participants were selected from a randomly generated list of potential participants from the recruitment company's database.

Structure

Participants attended a structured two-hour focus group session, incorporating group discussion and several activities which involved completing questionnaires and estimating sentencing ranges for specific offences. The structured focus group discussions centred on understanding participants' perspectives of sentencing

concepts generally and their understanding of sentencing terms and sentencing outcomes.

The first hour focused on the purposes of sentencing (the topic discussed in this research brief). The second hour explored participants' understanding of sentencing terms and their knowledge of sentencing outcomes—this research is covered in a separate publication.²⁷

Focus group discussions were supplemented with written responses that were filled in by participants during the course of the session. A copy of the written activities that were provided to participants are included in the appendix (see page 30).

For the first activity, the facilitator explained each of the purposes of sentencing to participants and then asked them to take a moment to consider which was the most important. Participants were asked to rank the level of importance they would attribute to each purpose of sentencing, from one (most important) to five (least important).

For the second activity, participants were asked to rank each purpose of sentencing across six scenarios, looking at three different offences: possessing dangerous drugs, assaults occasioning bodily harm and home burglary, for both first-time and repeat offenders.

Participants were then invited to discuss the process they went through in ranking the purposes in the order they did in each scenario.

²⁷ Jeffs et al (n 15).

Table 1: Demographics of focus group participants (n=66)

Demographic characteristic	Focus Groups %	2021 Census Queensland %
Gender		
Female	53.0	51.0
Male	47.0	49.0
Age		
18-34 years	7.6	29.2
35-54 years	39.4	34.1
55-75 years	47.0	28.6
Over 75 years	6.1	8.1
Indigenous status		
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	12.1	4.3 ^a
Non-Indigenous	87.9	95.7 ^a
Highest education level		
Secondary	19.7	35.3 ^{a,b}
Post-secondary	45.5	30.0 ^a
Tertiary	34.8	27.9 ^a
Employment status		
Formally employed	55.8	64.0 ^c
Not formally employed	47.8	36.0
Location		
South-East Queensland	53.0	62.9 ^d
Brisbane		Major cities
Regional Queensland	27.3	34.2 ^d
Townsville		Regional
Remote Queensland	19.7	2.6 ^d
Mount Isa		Remote

Source: Focus group interviews conducted 2022; Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS): Population by age and sex release,²⁸ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander release,²⁹ education release,³⁰ employment release,³¹ remoteness structure.³²

Notes:

- 2021 Census data includes people aged 15 to 17 years, and this age group was not able to be excluded.
- Does not include 6.8% with below Year 10 level in Queensland, or those otherwise missing from ABS figures.
- Employment-to-population ratio for November 2022 as presented by the ABS, includes full-time and part-time employment.
- Location data as of 2016 Census.

Limitations

The generalisability of the focus group data is limited as the participants were not a representative sample of the Queensland population across all demographics. Other limitations reflect those generally associated with focus group-based research design, including participants may not feel comfortable presenting their honest views in front of others, particularly in regional and remote locations where participants are more likely to know each other. During focus group discussions, there is also a risk that one or more participants may dominate the discussion, even when facilitators seek to involve all participants equally. While these limitations are inherent to a focus group research design, every effort was made to ensure that the focus groups were run in a structured, inclusive, ethical, and respectful manner. As the primary intention of this research was to gain a deeper insight into public understanding of sentencing, the Council was confident these limitations did not restrict the potential benefits associated with the use of focus groups.

²⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National, State and Territory Population* (ABS, March 2022) Table 53: Estimated Resident Population By Single Year Of Age, Queensland.

²⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian* (ABS, June 2021) Table 21: Highest educational attainment by state/territory by sex, Persons aged 15-74 years.

³⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Education and Work, Australia* (ABS, May 2022) Table 21: Highest educational attainment by state/territory by sex, Persons aged 15-74 years.

³¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force, Australia* (ABS, November 2022).

³² Queensland Government Statistician's Office, Queensland Treasury, 'Meshblock Correspondence File (ASGS 2016)' <<https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/visualisations-geographies/geographical-hierarchies/meshblock-correspondence-file-asgs-2016>>; drawing upon data from Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 5 - Remoteness Structure* (Catalogue No 1270.0.55.005, 16 March 2018).

FINDINGS

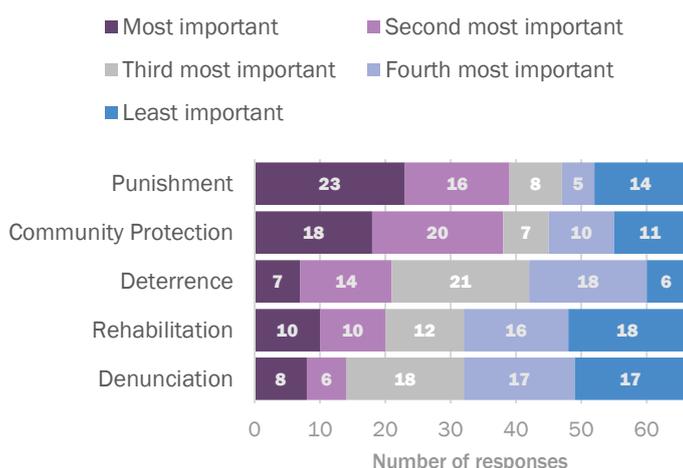
Ranking sentencing purposes

Participants were provided with verbal and written definitions of the five purposes of sentencing. They were asked to rank these purposes in order of importance, from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important).

There was a lot of variation in how participants ranked the purposes. Punishment was ranked as the most important by the largest number of participants (n=23, 34.8%), but this was closely followed by community protection (n=18, 27.3%)—see Figure 1.

Although punishment was ranked as the most important purpose by the largest proportion of participants, this view was not unanimous. In fact, 1 in 5 participants ranked punishment as the least important purpose of sentencing (n=14, 21.2%). This highlights the diversity of opinions among participants regarding the relative importance of sentencing purposes.

Figure 1: Activity 1, participants' ranking of the importance of each purpose of sentencing



There were patterns in how sentencing purposes were ranked together. People who selected community protection as the most important purpose often chose punishment as their second choice. Similarly, people who chose punishment as their most important sentencing purpose, most often selected either community protection or deterrence as their second choice.

Deterrence was chosen as participants' first preference the least often. However, it was also the least frequently selected as the last important purpose, positioning it in the middle in terms of overall importance.

Overlapping purposes

As noted earlier, a sentence can serve one purpose or multiple purposes simultaneously.³³ Case law emphasises that courts must balance these purposes, even though each purpose may sometimes point in different directions and make them challenging to reconcile.³⁴

Participants recognised this overlapping nature, noting that the purposes of sentencing are interrelated and cannot be considered in isolation. Many participants struggled to separate one purpose from another, noting that achieving one often required addressing others simultaneously.

You would hope punishment would go hand-in-hand and they'd be deterred by being punished.

Female, Townsville, T5

If you can deter them and stop them, then you maybe can rehabilitate them and they a) won't do the crime again and b) won't end up in prison.

Male, Brisbane, B8

Participants highlighted the difficulty of ranking sentencing purposes, reflecting the complexity of balancing these objectives in practice. For some, the interconnected nature of the purposes made it challenging to determine which should take precedence.

When I looked at it, the top three that I chose were the community, deterrence, and punishment. I struggled between choosing which came first, the chicken or the egg because it's about the community protection but you need to deter them from doing that.

Female, Brisbane, B26

There's two or three [purposes] in most of them because you can't have rehabilitation unless you get deterred, and you can't deter anybody unless you denunciate what they're doing. Then rehabilitation comes then after that.

Female, Mount Isa, M4

A recurring theme was the tendency to equate punishment with community protection. Many participants viewed imprisonment as the primary mechanism for achieving both punishment and community protection, making it difficult to distinguish between the two.

I think the community protection in our society is putting them in jail for a longer period and that's equated to punishment. I think they're one and the same.

Male, Townsville, T6

It was common for participants to view the purposes as interchangeable and interlinked. For example, punishment through imprisonment was seen to achieve community

³³ PSA (n 1) s 9(1)(f).

³⁴ *Veen v. The Queen (No. 2)* (n 4) 476.

protection through incarceration. Similarly, punishment was seen as achieving the other purposes of sentencing.

I suppose I'm looking at punishment almost as community protection. They need to be locked away.

Male, Mount Isa, M6

The amount of punishment determines to what degree it affects the other areas. You have a light punishment, there's no community protection, there's no denunciation, there's no deterrence. There's nothing. So a large sentence is - builds up in those areas. They're all - they all work together.

Male, Townsville, T6

What offences were they thinking about?

Previous research has shown that the type of offence influences how people prioritise sentencing purposes.³⁵ After completing the ranking exercise, participants were asked about the type of crime they were thinking about while completing the activity.

[Prompt] When you ranked this as the most important purpose, did you have a particular type of offence or offender in mind?

Participants were thinking of a wide variety of scenarios including high profile crimes reported in the media, fraud and other white-collar crimes, crimes committed by disadvantaged young adults, sex offences against children, property crimes such as car theft, and domestic violence. Other participants explained that they had considered a well-balanced mix of different types of offences.

High profile offences

It was fairly common for participants to be thinking of high-profile incidents that had been reported in the media. These were generally serious crimes for which the purposes of punishment and community protection were preferred.

I'm thinking about - for offenders who stabbed a 57-year-old yesterday, I think. Previous night in Laidley. Southeast Queensland. I don't know whether - I think they were young offenders so maybe outside of the conversation but I'm thinking, what was going through their minds and [it] certainly wasn't the consequences.

[Punishment] Male, Townsville, T8

The guy that got out of jail and killed an elderly lady in Woogaroo. Him.

The fella that just - that just got a very short, small sentence and it's been in the news this week or last week that got in a car, stolen vehicle, and killed a couple and the lady who was with child at the - and so the three of them all got perished. Innocent people.

[Community protection] Female, Townsville, T5

I'm thinking of particularly of crimes like people who murder or sexual predators, paedophiles, that sort of stuff, right?

[Community protection] Male, Brisbane, B35

It would be more the murder type scenario for me.

[Punishment] Male, Brisbane, B15

Well-balanced mix of offences

Some participants considered a range of offences. The most important purpose of sentencing tended to be more diverse for these.

Rather than think of something specific, [I was] just trying to keep my mind open that it could be anything from physical violence, direct violence, armed robbery, all the way to traffic offences and that would get a fine.

[Community Protection] Female, Brisbane, B10

I went through like five or six different crimes from stealing a bicycle to committing murder.

[Deterrence] Female, Brisbane, B26

I was actually thinking that each of these different [outcomes] is appropriate for a different sort of crime and not that this is a model of what process you go through for a particular crime. So for example, community protection would be someone who habitually would be sexually assaulting children. Rehabilitation could be for a drug offender. Denunciation is people that speed or recreationally use marijuana. Punishment could be someone who stole money from their boss and they need to pay it back but they don't necessarily need to be incarcerated. Deterrence is speed traps on the road.

[Rehabilitation] Female, Townsville, T13

Murder, pedo's white collar crime, fraud.

[Denunciation] Female, Brisbane, B11

Disadvantaged young offenders

A number of participants considered offences committed by disadvantaged young adults.

I was just thinking, in general, of young offenders, just over 18, that have probably come from a disadvantaged background, and they get in with the wrong crowd.

[Denunciation] Female, Brisbane, B6

I was thinking of the 18-19-year-old Indigenous kid that's had the hard - he's been put from foster care to foster care. To me rehab, put them back to country.

[Rehabilitation] Female, Townsville, T14

Other types of offending

While a lot of people thought of the worst-case scenarios, others were more reasoned and practical in their thinking, considering crimes that had a greater direct impact on their lives. This demonstrates the difference in how the public considers crime and formulates their opinions.

³⁵ Moritz, Pearson and Mitchell (n 11) 18.

I've got a sort of a personal [interest] in that situation that my home is alongside of a social housing, if you like, and there is a parking area that's within this social housing group. In the past 12 months, there has been a minimum of 15 stolen cars parked in that parking area.

[Deterrence] **Male, Townsville, T7**

I was thinking more of domestic violence because it's a huge issue in Australia. Having a woman murdered every week and it's really just not even mentioned sometimes. I find that's one of the major crimes that the community—Australia—faces.

[Community Protection] **Female, Brisbane, B7**

Paedophiles. They should be locked up for life. The whole lot of them.

[Community Protection] **Female, Townsville, T5**

I think as a people who have committed such a fraud, be it a bank or a building society or whatever, and they've taken people's money and they've left them homeless and they've got absolutely nothing. Then they can disappear into the ethos and live off that money. That person that's lost all their money is almost on Centrelink and cleaning toilets. For me, I see a very black and white thing on that on punishment for that person. I'd like to see them cleaning the jail toilets.

[Punishment] **Female, Brisbane, B2**

Differences by scenario

As we just observed, the type of offence or offender can influence how people prioritise the purposes of sentencing.

To explore this further, we asked participants to rank the importance of sentencing purposes across six scenarios, each involving different types of offences and contexts. This included three types of offences: drug possession, assault causing injury, and home burglary. Each offence was presented in two contexts: first-time offenders and repeat offenders.

After completing their rankings, participants were invited to reflect on and discuss the reasoning behind their decisions for each scenario.

Figure 2 shows the way participants ranked each scenario.

There were differences in rankings based on the type of offence and whether the offender was a first-time or repeat offender.

For first-time offenders, deterrence was generally viewed as the most important purpose, though this varied by offence. For example, in the drug possession scenario, deterrence was ranked highest, followed by rehabilitation. For assault causing injury, punishment, denunciation, and deterrence were all viewed as important. Similarly, for home burglary, punishment, deterrence, and community protection were all prioritised as more important.

However, this changed for repeat offenders.

Punishment consistently emerged as the dominant purpose when the perpetrator was a repeat offender

regardless of the type of offence. This suggests that while participants' views on sentencing purposes vary depending on the offence type for first-time offenders, punishment is the clear priority for repeat offenders.

Community protection was also seen as highly important for repeat offenders, particularly in the scenario of assault causing injury and home burglary, though it was not seen as a priority for drug offending.

Rehabilitation was generally ranked low across most scenarios but was viewed as more important for first-time drug offenders. This indicates that participants may view rehabilitation as more relevant when addressing underlying issues, such as substance use, rather than for offences involving harm to others or property.

Overall, the findings highlight a shift in priorities depending on the offender's history. While deterrence is central for first-time offenders, punishment becomes significantly more important for repeat offenders, reflecting a stronger focus on accountability and consequences for repeated criminal behaviour. Community protection also plays a key role, particularly for offences involving harm or intrusion, such as assault or burglary.

Differences by type of offence

Participants' views of sentencing purposes changed depending on the type of offence. Many considered factors like how much harm the offence caused, the culpability and whether it was planned, and how prevalent the offence was in the community.

This section explores the differences in how participants ranked each offence for first-time offenders. The scenarios involving repeat offenders will be discussed in the next section.

Offence type 1: Drug possession

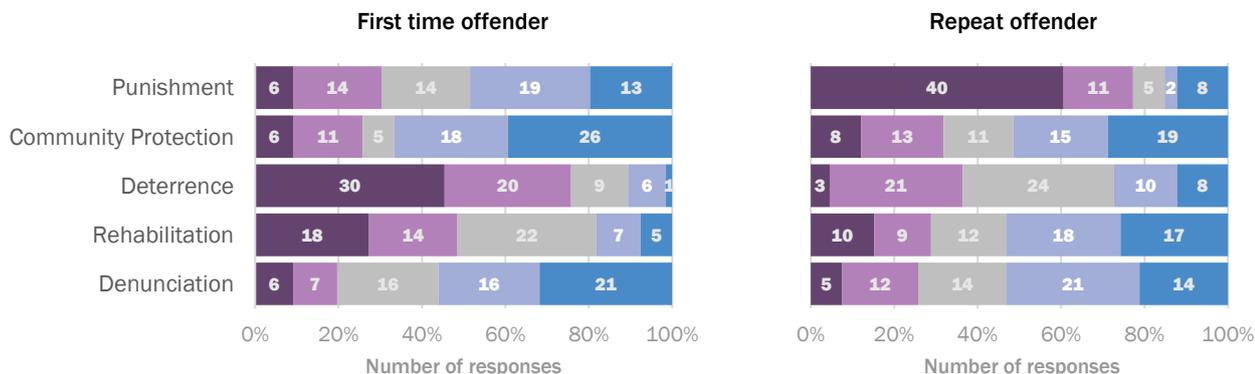
The drug possession scenario involved an adult who was sentenced for carrying methamphetamines.

Deterrence and rehabilitation were the most commonly prioritised purposes for first-time offenders. Many participants ranked these two purposes as equally important, often placing one first and the other second.

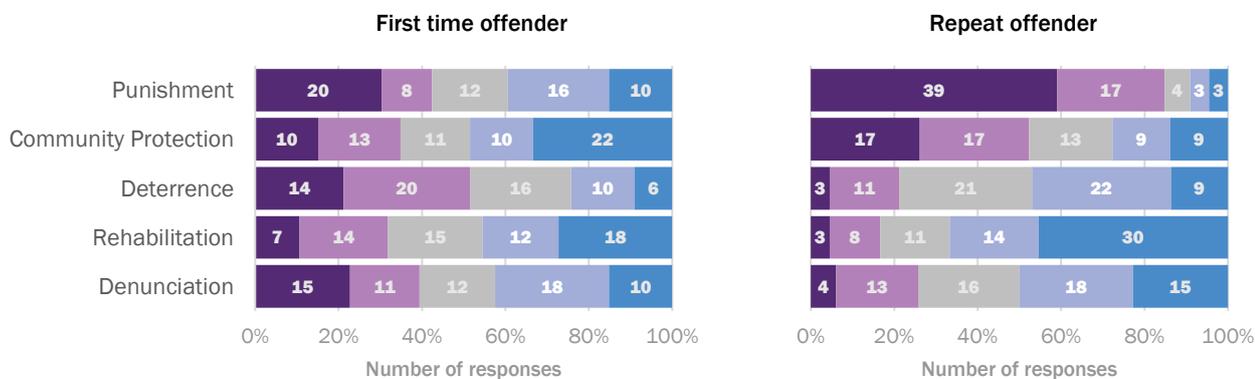
Figure 2: Activity 2, participants' ranking of sentencing purposes for six scenarios

Most important
 Second most important
 Third most important
 Second least important
 Least important

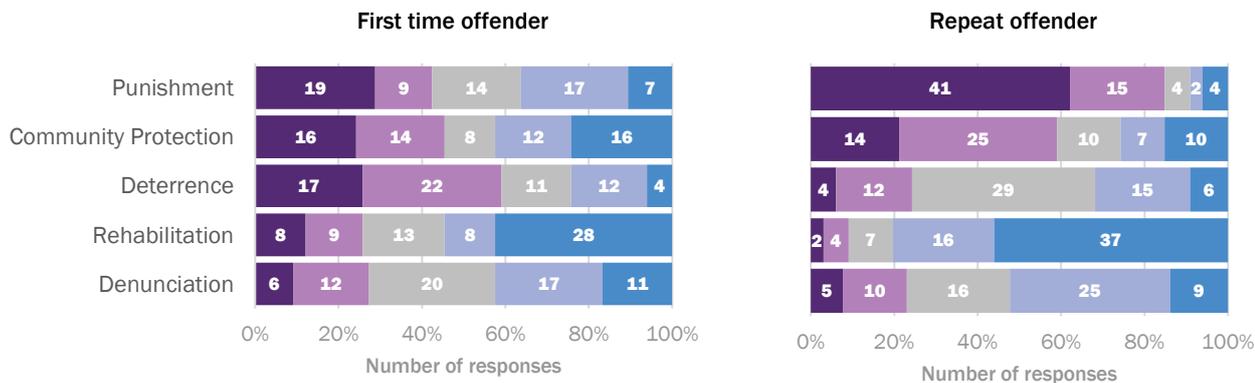
Offence 1: Drug possession



Offence 2: Assault causing injury



Offence 3: Home burglary



First time drug possession was the only scenario in which rehabilitation featured prominently. One participant noted how their perspective shifted for this scenario:

My answer is the opposite in this instance to everything I said before.

[Denunciation]

Female, Townsville, T13

Discussions with participants suggested two main factors influenced how they ranked the sentencing purposes. The first was whether they saw the harm caused by drug possession as limited to the individual offender or as having broader impacts on the community. The second was their view of the nature of drug offending—whether they saw it as something that shouldn't be criminalised, a health issue requiring treatment, or a dangerous act that causes significant harm. These are explored in the sections below.

Perceptions about harm caused by drug offending

Participants' views on the sentencing purposes appeared to be strongly influenced by their perceptions of harm caused by drug possession. Harm was discussed in two ways: the scope of harm (whether it was limited to the individual or extended to the broader community) and the degree of harm (whether the offence was seen as minor or highly serious).

Participants who viewed the harm as limited to the individual tended to prioritise deterrence. In contrast, participants who viewed drug possession as having broader community impacts placed a higher emphasis on community protection and punishment.

Participants who saw the offence as a personal issue with limited consequences for others believed sentencing should aim to deter offending. For these participants, rehabilitation was also seen as important, and punishment and community protection were often deprioritised.

Someone possessing a small amount of illegal drug. I thought, well, they're on a road that's no good. [...] That person is on a downward path, but how does it affect everyone? I saw that a bit more as an individual scenario. Could you rehab that person? Punishment to fit the crime but focus more on the person as a result or as an end vision of what you want to achieve in your sentence?

[Rehabilitation]

Female, Brisbane, B11

If they were just for personal use and they just went a bit wayward. Just to deter them from doing it again.

[Deterrence]

Female, Brisbane, B6

For a drug user or person possessing it, the community protection is not so high because they're not – it's usually affecting them, not the community as such.

[Deterrence]

Male, Mount Isa, M7

Is that going to be affecting all the kids in the neighbourhood? Is that going to be affecting everyone in the community? Is it affecting all of Queensland? That person is on a downward path, but how does it affect everyone? I saw that a bit more as an individual scenario.

[Deterrence]

Female, Brisbane, B10

For drug possessions, it's more likely they're only going to harm themselves rather than other people unless it turns into assault or something along those lines or the other crimes. But pure possession would be just causing harm to themselves.

[Deterrence]

Female, Brisbane, B30

On the other hand, participants who saw drug possession as a broader community issue prioritised community protection and punishment. They highlighted concerns about the ripple effects of drug use, such as exposing young people to drugs, or the potential for drug-related behaviours to lead to further crimes. For these participants, sentencing was seen as needing to address not only the individual offender but also the broader risks posed to society.

The dangerous drug. I put community protection in that because of the possibility he'd be passing it on to minors.

[Community protection]

Male, Townsville, T7

For the drugs, it's more getting the drugs off the street. Protect the community by taking that person and getting them off [the drugs]. [...] So that the drugs don't keep going through the community into the kids – the more the drugs get in, the easier it is, the younger they get it and then the more problems happen.

[Community protection]

Male, Brisbane, B3

So, for me, possessing a dangerous drug in the first instance was to protect the community, protect our young people from the drugs. From getting onto the drugs in the first place. [...] So, [the most important purpose of sentencing for] drugs for me was basically protect the community mostly.

[Community protection]

Female, Townsville, T5

I put him up as punishment [as the most important purpose of sentencing] and then rehabilitation. Because I think if it's a dangerous drug, cocaine or whatever it is, you've got to hit home quick and then the rehabilitation comes in, second, I thought, and deterrence. But you've also got to protect the community from those people because they do some silly things and especially with our law enforcements, they're not to be messed with really.

[Punishment]

Male, Mount Isa, M5

Participants also differed in their views on the level of harm caused by drug possession.

Some participants downplayed the seriousness of drug possession, questioning whether it should be treated as a criminal offence at all. They viewed drug use as a personal choice that did not necessarily cause much harm and argued that there were better ways to address the issue than through the justice system.

I went for rehabilitation [as the most important purpose of sentencing] because, to be honest, I don't think they should be crimes. There're far better ways to deal with the problems of drug use.

[Rehabilitation]

Male, Mount Isa, M10

So, they got caught with a drug. Celebrities get caught with drugs all the time, big deal. That's their business. As long as they don't affect me or the community. [...] It's against law but there's a lot of people doing it.

[Deterrence]

Male, Townsville, T17

I put rehabilitation [as the most important purpose of sentencing]. It's like right, this person has got a drug problem, obviously there needs to be an intervention to discourage them from using the drug.

[Rehabilitation]

Female, Brisbane, B30

Other participants viewed drug possession as a dangerous act, particularly when it involved substances like methamphetamines (the drug specified in the scenario provided). They highlighted the destructive impact these drugs could have on individuals, families, and communities, as well as the potential for drug possession to lead to dealing or exposing others—especially young people—to harm. For these participants, punishment and deterrence were prioritised to address the significant risks posed by such offences.

I think drugs, people don't realise, people - maybe they do realise just how bad an impact on society is. Whether it be law enforcement or whether it be hospitals and that. So yeah, that's it. You do the wrong thing, you get punished and I believe that that would change society but over a period of time.

[Punishment]

Female, Townsville, T1

I'm not in any way lenient about offences for drug possession because of your specific information given that you said it was methamphetamine. If it was a marijuana joint or something I would be completely agreeing with [other participant who prioritised a rehabilitative approach for first-time drug offenders], but methamphetamine is life destructive and its life changing for families and youth and if someone's got it then they're going to share it or deal it or give it to someone [younger].

[Deterrence]

Male, Townsville, T16

With the drugs as well, yeah, I did [say] about the - being meth and stuff, it's sort of - it's a harder drug rather than sort of, yeah, cannabis or ecstasy and stuff.

[Deterrence]

Male, Townsville, T18

I watch enough RBT to see that - they're hurting other people too because they're driving under the influence. They're going to speed, they're going to get into accidents. [...] We cannot just let them slip away. We need to find some kind of rehab for them and protect the community.

[Rehabilitation]

Female, Brisbane, B25

Addressing underlying issues

For many participants, drug possession was framed as a health issue requiring treatment and rehabilitation. These participants prioritised rehabilitation as the most important purpose of sentencing, seeing it as a way to address the root causes of drug use and prevent future harm. Deterrence was also considered important, but punishment was often deprioritised in favour of approaches that focused on behavioural change and community protection through rehabilitation facilities.

I think, especially with drugs, rehabilitation maybe should be [the most important purpose of sentencing].

[Rehabilitation]

Female, Brisbane, B32

If it's a small quantity they're just users. So as a user, you deter them. Rehab, change their behaviour, tell them it's a bad idea, you shouldn't be doing it. Punishment last.

[Rehabilitation]

Female, Brisbane, B11

So, I've got rehabilitation and then community protection [as the most important purposes of sentencing]. Community protection in that they're in a rehab facility.

[Rehabilitation]

Male, Brisbane, B20

Offence type 2: Assault causing injury

The assault causing injury scenario involved an adult who was sentenced for punching someone in the face, causing bruising and a fractured nose.

Punishment, deterrence, and denunciation were generally seen as the most important purposes, while community protection and rehabilitation were deprioritised.

We identified four main factors that influenced how participants ranked the sentencing purposes for this scenario. The first was the influence of media and public awareness campaigns about 'coward punches', which shaped participants' views on the seriousness of such offences. The second was their perception of significant community harm, largely driven by the belief that assaults are random and unpredictable, leading many to prioritise community protection. The third was the belief that violence is universally unacceptable, with participants emphasising the need for punishment. Finally, some participants focused on addressing underlying issues, prioritising rehabilitation as a way to help offenders change and prevent future harm. These factors are explored in the sections below.

Influence of media and public awareness campaigns

Media campaigns about 'coward punches', 'one-punch' incidents, and the offence of unlawful striking causing death strongly influenced participants' views. Even when provided with a scenario where the harm was limited to bruising and a fractured nose, many participants associated assaults with the potential for fatal outcomes. This reflects the success of public awareness campaigns about these types of acts. Participants saw denunciation, deterrence, and punishment as a way to reinforce social norms and send a clear message that violent behaviour is unacceptable.

So, for assault, I put denunciation [as the most important purpose of sentencing]. So, if it's the first-time offender, then they need to be denounced. Like sort of change in the [language] like look what you've done. You - that's just not on.

[Denunciation]

Female, Brisbane, B30

So, everyone knows what a king hit punch is now, but I don't think we've seen it in the media as much as what it has been. Maybe it still happens, and it just doesn't get reported.

[Punishment] Female, Brisbane, B10

Even with the assault causing injury for the first-time offender, I still gave punishment. Number one, because you still have the one punch kills.

[Punishment] Female, Brisbane, B14

Perceptions of harm and community impact

Participants viewed assault causing injury harm as a serious crime that could happen to anyone in the community. They perceived assaults as largely random, generating fear and the belief that anyone could be a victim. This sense of unpredictability influenced participants to prioritise community protection, as well as punishment and deterrence, as ways to prevent harm and ensure public safety.

With assaulting – assault causing injury, both times I put community protection quite high. Just because nobody wants to be out and about and get punched for no reason at all.

[Community protection] Female, Brisbane, B1

I'm probably more concerned about assaulting people. [...] You're just a person getting off the bus or getting on a train and they don't like something that you're doing, so [they think] I'll just push them and then quickly run off. I find that very unsettling, so I'd probably more – not so much rehabilitate the first time but have a deterrence. Then if they do it again, well, you've got to protect the community.

[Deterrence] Female, Brisbane, B7

More punishment for the attack on the person. That should be sentenced a bit harsher than the burglary, which is property. You can – insurance can replace a TV; you can't replace a life. You can't replace the nerves and the bones and the part of your mind that you broke when someone hits you. No insurance can fix that part of it. But they can buy a new car, buy a new TV.

[Punishment] Male, Brisbane, B3

First off, for assault, is like rehabilitate people to not be punching people. Don't allow it to happen in the first place. Two was community protection. Who wants to get the phone call in the middle of the night that your kid's been king hit and is dying in hospital because someone's punched them out of anger?

[Rehabilitation] Female, Townsville, T5

Everyone knows that violence is never acceptable

Participants expressed the view that violence is something everyone knows is wrong, and that offenders should expect to face consequences for their actions.

Assault was seen as a clear breach of basic social expectations, with participants emphasising that adults, in particular, should know better than to resort to physical harm. This belief underpinned a strong preference for

punishment as the most appropriate sentencing purpose, reflecting a retributive view that those who commit violent acts deserve to be held accountable.

For many participants, the expectation of punishment was tied to the idea that society has made it clear that violence is unacceptable.

The assault causing injury, first-time offender I actually had punishment [as the most important purpose of sentencing] because you're doing the wrong thing. You don't go punching people, especially when you have this one punch law where you're done.

[Punishment] Female, Brisbane, B24

For the other ones, assault and burglary, I'm sorry, for me, punishment is [the most important purpose of sentencing] because you know you've done the wrong thing.

[Punishment] Female, Brisbane, B25

The assault, once again, I put punishment [as the most important purpose of sentencing] because the fact is that we all know that physically harming somebody else or even emotionally harming somebody else is not appropriate and we all know that today. [...] We're not talking about kids, we're talking about adults.

[Punishment] Male, Townsville, T9

With causing injury, I think that's a – nobody likes to be punched in the mouth or king hit, so I think that's very cowardly, and I put a punishment there [as the most important purpose of sentencing].

[Punishment] Male, Mount Isa, M5

Addressing underlying issues

Some participants believed that committing an assault indicated something was wrong with the offender. They argued that no rational person would resort to violence, suggesting that offenders might have underlying issues that needed to be addressed. For these participants, rehabilitation was prioritised over punishment, as they saw it as a way to address the root causes of violent behaviour and prevent future offending.

The assault, first injury, [the most important purpose of sentencing] is rehab to me. It's like why on earth would someone punch somebody? There's got to be an underlying reason.

[Rehabilitation] Male, Townsville, T2

if it happens the first time, fine, you try and send a strong message that you mustn't do it and we'll try and give you some counselling.

[Denunciation] Female, Brisbane, B4

For the assault, I put rehabilitation [as the most important purpose of sentencing] because if someone's willing to be able to go and punch somebody else just because they may be offended, they really need to think of those consequences and they really need to not do it again. They need to get their anger in check.

[Rehabilitation] Female, Townsville, T5

Maybe they're always going every Saturday, getting into a big biffa at a drinking session, its alcohol related [...] or maybe it is a family related situation that they have the same set of arguments all the time. [...] That person needs some sort of assessment and you need to look at what other factors [...] If you've had to punch somebody, it's not a pleasant sensation, so to go to that extent is – they must be very driven. It'd be interesting to look at what is the case behind all of that.

[Punishment]

Male, Mount Isa, M6

Offence type 3: Home burglary

The home burglary scenario involved an adult who was sentenced for breaking into someone's home to steal items such as laptops, jewellery, or other valuables.

Participants generally prioritised punishment, community protection, and deterrence as the most important sentencing purposes for this offence. Rehabilitation was ranked as the least important purpose by the largest number of participants.

Discussions indicated that there were several reasons that influenced the way the sentencing purposes were ranked. First, burglary was thought to cause harm that extended beyond property damage, deeply impacting personal safety, feelings of security, and having wider impacts on the community. This led many participants to prioritise community protection. Second, as with the assault scenario discussed above, many felt that burglary was something that perpetrators knew to be wrong, which resulted in calls towards punishment. Third, participants viewed burglary as an offence that was often premeditated rather than impulsive, leading them to prioritise deterrence. Fourth, some participants relied on personal experience, and these people tended to prioritise community protection, punishment and deterrence. Finally, a few participants prioritised rehabilitation as a means of addressing underlying issues that resulted in this offending. These factors are discussed below.

Perceptions of harm and community impact

Participants viewed burglary as more than a property offence. It was described as something that challenged participants' sense of personal safety within their homes. These participants seemed to prioritise community protection, although views were diverse and many of the purposes of sentencing were ranked highly by participants who spoke about the harm caused by burglary.

You can replace possessions, but you can't fix emotions and I think that's the thing with burglaries—and assault even—it's that fear that you carry that ruins people's lives.

[Punishment]

Female, Brisbane, B4

What if they get caught then what happens, you know, do they hurt people if they get caught as they're stealing stuff and – because they're doing it a second time, then probably third, fourth fifth, yeah, keep going and going and going. Because you're going to get caught eventually, someone will be home accidentally, yeah, and they didn't know that person's home in their house. Yeah, then what happens?

[Community protection]

Female, Mount Isa, M9

The ramifications from home burglary were something that people felt impacted the entire community, not just the households targeted, and had the ability to change the way neighbourhoods interacted.

Things like the burglary impacts on people and it impacts the community. Even if it's one house that gets burgled, the whole street lives in fear. it changes the way your suburb interacts – women don't jog anymore at night. People don't go out on their own. [...] This affects a whole street. When one house is burgled, everyone behaves differently in the street.

[Community protection]

Female, Brisbane, B11

You lose your sense of freedom.

[Deterrence]

Male, Brisbane, B8

With burglary, it's a community issue as well. It makes the suburb rating go down and then you'll have less people wanting to live there, so house prices go down. It just keeps attracting the wrong crowd of people going in there. You'll get more renters, not quality people.

[Rehabilitation]

Female, Brisbane, B1

The fear of further victimisation, along with the long-term impacts of the crime, made participants feel strongly about denouncing through punishment and community protection.

Because people – there's a lot of an older community that are in home nowadays. [...] They break in, they don't just steal the jewellery anymore, they, for some reason, go off their head and they punch the elderly.

[Denunciation]

Male, Brisbane, B20

They know what they're doing and because it's happened to me, it's not easy. I think the effect that it has on you that someone's broken in, too. So, that's why I put community protection [as the most important purpose of sentencing for] home burglary and then for doing it again, I've put punishment.

[Community protection]

Female, Brisbane, B21

Everyone knows that burglary is wrong

Participants viewed home burglary as a crime that demonstrated a high level of culpability.

Many participants believed that offenders knew what they were doing and understood the harm they were causing. They expressed a sense of frustration and anger about the mere idea of people encroaching in others' space and taking or destroying what they had worked hard for. This heightened their sense of outrage and shaped their views on appropriate sentencing responses.

This perception of culpability led participants to prioritise punishment as key sentencing purposes.

With burglary, that's encroaching on your own personal area and your own personal way, if it's the first-time, well the punishment should be the last thing that happens. The rehabilitation and the community protection are very, very, very high [in importance] for that person. If it's done on a regular basis, no, I put punishment as [the most important purpose of sentencing].

[Denunciation] **Male, Mount Isa, M1**

Home burglary, punishment was [the most important purpose of sentencing] in the first instance because they've got to stop [...] People are working hard for what they have [...] For the repeat offender, I just put community protection [as most important]. We want to keep the things we work hard for.

[Punishment] **Female, Townsville, T5**

For the home burglary first-time offender, I'm just hard-nosed about that because [the most important purpose of sentencing] is punishment and two is denunciation. Telling them tidy their act up.

[Punishment] **Male, Townsville, T7**

Home burglary, again, punishment I gave [the most important purpose of sentencing]. Don't really have too much time for people that get into burglary, whether it was first-time or repeat.

[Punishment] **Male, Townsville, T8**

For burglary, I put [the most important purpose of sentencing] for both as punishment. Rehabilitation, [least important] because they're going to break in. It's very hard to train them not to because they've probably got too much time on their hands.

[Punishment] **Male, Brisbane, B34**

For me, punishment is [the most important purpose] because you know you've done the wrong thing. Burglarising a house is quite an effort.[...] But to actually go into somebody's house... I put community protection as [the second most important purpose].

[Punishment] **Female, Brisbane, B24**

For breaking in, [...] they know what they're doing and because it's happened to me, it's not easy. I think the effect that it has on you that someone's broken in, too. So, that's why I put community protection, home burglary and then for doing it again, I've put punishment. [There's an] impact on people, because if you go in someone's house, you know you're going to cause problems.

[Community protection] **Female, Brisbane, B21**

I might think differently if I actually got burgled. It's very easy to sort of say that when it hasn't affected me personally, but I don't know, I guess if someone came in and stole half of my things and trashed my place at the same time, I might go, should be thrown in jail for 10 years [laughs]. Yeah, you know? It's very difficult to say what - unless you've had that personal experience with crime.

[Denunciation] **Female, Brisbane, B31**

Unlike offences that might occur impulsively or in the heat of the moment, many participants viewed burglary as a deliberate and premeditated act. This perception of premeditation tended to lead to a prioritisation of deterrence as the most important sentencing purpose.

Burglary, it's less impulsive and I think the more you think about these things before you do it the higher the punishment should be.

[Deterrence] **Male, Mount Isa, M13**

I think the drugs and even assault, it can be a brain snap that something's happened, something's triggered, but when they're consciously making that decision to open a door or smash a window and break into someone's home, they're talking about a different type of crime. They're making that decision before the event's even happened.

[Denunciation] **Female, Townsville, T14**

So, it's, to my way of thinking, rehabilitation is probably a little bit down the line but punishment is paramount. For the home burglary, well I think the young folk, my opinion is that a lot of them do it just for the adrenaline rush and like break into my place because I've got something that he hasn't got at home or he might want to have a new TV or new whatever and I want one of those and a new phone and they just do it for - to do something in devilment, isn't it? It's an entertainment for them in a lot of cases.

[Deterrence] **Male, Mount Isa, M5**

Home burglary, same stuff with the deterrence and punishment, but I thought the repeat offender was about community protection because you don't want your houses getting broken into. But a one-off thing could be walking past and seeing your door open and walked in, so that's a bit different to someone that's organising to breaking in.

[Deterrence] **Mount Isa, Male, M7**

Personal experience

Several participants reported being affected either directly or indirectly through the experiences of family, friends, or neighbours. These participants generally focused on community protection, punishment, and deterrence, with less of a focus on denunciation and rehabilitation.

Yeah, we had an attempted home burglary when we were home. I'll tell you what, I - and the chap was still standing at the door after my husband went and flipped on the lights and he'd got the key out of the door and had the door unlocked.

[Community protection] **Female, Brisbane, B5**

We have at [redacted location], we have at least 10 break ins per night.

[Community protection] **Female, Brisbane, B26**

We've been broken into eight - no, nine times since we've been living in our home.

[Deterrence] **Male, Townsville, T9**

I myself, our house has been broken into three times.
[Punishment] Male, Mount Isa, M6

Punishment was for the repeat offenders. [...] The first
timers, no.
Male, Townsville, T7

Addressing underlying issues

Despite such strong feelings and opinions among participants in relation to home burglary, several still held positive attitudes towards sentencing. As with the other offences, there was a trend to be more lenient towards first-time offenders (i.e., punishment as a lower priority), but then increasing the punitiveness as the offending continued.

There were still participants who believed that the right approach was to investigate the cause of the offending and attempt to rehabilitate or change the behaviour of first-time offenders. The merits of punishment were challenged, significantly so by a participant who had been victimised on multiple occasions.

The home burglary, again, the first offender, I was thinking rehab was the big issue for those people because you can possibly turn them around. Once I got to the repeat offender, I went straight for community protection because you're starting to get into that sort of stuff. So, that was what was important for me.
[Rehabilitation] Male, Brisbane, B9

The home burglary first-time offender, deterrence again to try and discourage the person and the other people from committing the same type of offence. Punishment was [the least important purpose of sentencing for a first-time offender], understanding that it could be a week later and you've got that same person back in there. So then you've got to go with punishment first and rehab's last.
[Deterrence] Male, Townsville, T2

So, with the burglary, I know everybody feels quite strongly about community protection, but I felt that that deterrence and rehabilitation to be possibly the first step and [then] punishment.
[Rehabilitation] Female, Townsville, T4

Differences for repeat offenders

Repeat offending had a considerable impact on how participants ranked the purposes of sentencing, often overriding the differences observed between offence types.

As we discussed above, the type of offence influenced the participant's preferences (such as rehabilitation being prioritised for first-time drug possession, punishment and denunciation for assaults, and punishment and community protection for burglaries). However, the repeat offender factor appeared to have a much stronger effect. For repeat offenders, the majority of participants consistently ranked punishment as the most important sentencing purpose, with community protection also increasing in importance. This was consistent across all scenarios.

In short, participants' views on sentencing purposes changed considerably when presented with a repeat offender, with a greater focus on punishment and community protection, and less emphasis on rehabilitation. As one participant put it:

It changed - it went diametric opposite really with all the repeat offenders.
Male, Brisbane, B17

From participant discussion, several key factors were identified that may have contributed to this shift towards punishment and community protection for repeat offenders. First, many participants believed repeating offending was a sign that earlier efforts at deterrence or rehabilitation had failed, leading them to prioritise punishment and community protection. Others, however, viewed it a sign of unresolved issues that needed further intervention. Second, participants saw repeat offenders as posing a greater risk of harm to the community, leading to a stronger focus on community protection and punishment. Finally, participants were unwilling to prioritise purposes like rehabilitation or deterrence for repeat offenders, believing they had already been given an opportunity to reform and failed to do so. These factors are explored in detail in the sections below.

Perceptions of intervention effectiveness

Participants' beliefs about whether earlier interventions had failed influenced their ranking of sentencing purposes.

The majority view was that repeat offending itself, by its very nature, shows deterrence and rehabilitation hadn't worked for these individuals. These participants prioritised punishment and community protection as more important. This was often framed as a need to protect the community from further harm and to hold offenders accountable for their actions.

I think with the possessing a dangerous drug [...]. I think deterrence would be the first-time offence, but then if they possessed it again, you would go straight to punishment. It was like, clearly, they haven't got the message from the first time.
Female, Brisbane, B1

When they're doing it the second time, is rehabilitation really working? You know that costs money too, resources, and it doesn't seem to be working.
Female, Mount Isa, M9

Repeat offence where obviously rehabilitation isn't working. I guess that I ranked them much higher for community protection, punishment, et cetera.
Male, Mount Isa, M13

So, my feeling wasn't so much about – yeah, more lenient on the first-time offender but the more repeats there are, there's got to be a decrease on emphasis on rehabilitation because it clearly hasn't worked first time around, and increased reliance in the sentencing on punishment and denunciation.

Male, Brisbane, B5

For the repeat offender, just straight to punishment because yeah, it's likely to kill another person or cause them serious harm.

Female, Brisbane, B30

Participants also believed that repeat offenders may have a longer history of repeat offending, which increased their perceived risk.

I know how hard it is to get a person in to court and usually a first-time offender in court is not a first-time offender. They're a first-time in court. A repeat offender, like many have said here.

Female, Townsville, T13

It's not doing it again; it's getting caught again. They've probably done it 20 times before they got caught again.

Male, Brisbane, B3

While the majority of participants saw repeat offending as evidence that deterrence and rehabilitation had failed, a few believed it reflected unresolved issues requiring further intervention. For these participants, repeat offending was seen as evidence of unaddressed underlying issues, such as addiction or behavioural problems that still needed to be resolved. They argued that further rehabilitation could help address these issues and prevent future offending.

I think repeated offenders are because of the failure of the rehabilitation. So because the rehabilitation was not done properly or it was not appropriate for them. [...] So probably for the repeat offenders, you also have to try to correct them again.

Male, Brisbane, B28

That's the point of the matter that they're not mentally stable. You find someone who steals money, who does any... You find anybody; young, old, medium age, they are all struggling with some sort of mental health. It all pins back to that and if we can resolve that, then there'll be literally no issues.

Female, Brisbane, B18

However, this view was not shared by other participants who pushed back on the idea that offending can be explained by mental health issues.

It's not a mental health issue.

Male, Brisbane, B15

You can blame everything on mental health, but it doesn't mean they're sick. They're just like that. No matter what you do, they'll keep doing it. You can't go kill someone and say, okay, but he's a mental health patient and that's fine.

Male, Brisbane, B19

Perceptions of risk for repeat offenders

Participants' views on the risk posed by repeat offenders influenced the way they ranked sentencing purposes.

The failure to desist after a first offence was seen as evidence of a higher likelihood of future offending. This shifted participants' focus towards community protection and harsher punishment. Repeat offenders were viewed as posing a greater threat to the community, and participants felt that sentencing should prioritise mitigating this risk. This contrasts with the leniency participants expressed towards first-time offenders, who were seen as posing less risk to the community.

I think most important thing [for repeat offenders] is community protection. Obviously, they don't care about the punishment, so they need to be kept away from the community.

Male, Townsville, T6

In all three [scenarios], my scoring changed very differently for the first time and a repeat offender. [...] I found myself thinking at some times, is it about the long-term benefit of this person that is being sentenced? Then other times I was like, this is about the community and taking care of the community, rather than taking care of the offender. My brain kept flipping between those.

Female, Brisbane, B10

Second chances for first-time offenders

Participants frequently expressed leniency towards first-time offenders, believing that sentencing should allow for the possibility of desistance through deterrence (and for drug offences, rehabilitation).

This was tied to the idea that first-time offenders should be given the benefit of the doubt, as some make mistakes and never do it again. Punishment and community protection were deprioritised for first-time offenders, as these offenders were seen as posing low level risk to the community and this was seen as an opportunity to steer individuals away from future offending without resorting to harsher punishment.

I'll give people the benefit of the doubt because I know in many situations, including my own, we've done things that you regret and you can be an adult and do it. You don't have to be a kid and sometimes just being hauled up in front of it might be enough to scare the living peepers out of you and you go, right, I'm not doing that

Male, Townsville, T2

Starting off the first-time offender, we all – as someone earlier said, we all make mistakes for any number of reasons, a few too many drinks, might have had a blue with someone, could be that you've lost someone close to you, marriage bust up, anything [unclear] we're all entitled to the one error in our lives or one mistake.

Male, Townsville, T12

For the first time, I put punishment and community protection pretty low. Just on the basis that look, you know, benefit of the doubt maybe. Everyone makes mistakes. If this is a one-off, give you a chance but do it again, yeah, punishment pretty high.

Male, Brisbane, B35

Can I also talk about the rehabilitation? I think it gives people another chance. Like they can make mistakes and give them rehab, give them – give them another chance.

Female, Townsville, T15

For all the first-time offenders I put down denunciation as [the most important purpose of sentencing] because I don't think there would be a point in punishing them initially.

Male, Brisbane, B12

I tended to focus on the first-time offenders more, I focused on the rehabilitation and getting them to do the right thing whereas if you've done it again, I hit them a bit harder because I hear what people say, they knew what they were doing.

Male, Brisbane, B23

Conversely, participants were reluctant to give repeat offenders another chance. Many participants described their approach towards this group as being harsher, indicating a greater focus on punishment as the main purpose of sentencing.

So, I mean, if anyone repeats any kind of this offence, it should be punishment straight away. That's what I think. They are already given [the] opportunity to correct themselves in terms of denunciation or deterrence but if they are not realising that then it should be punishment.

Male, Brisbane, B12

It's like giving people a second chance and third chances, [...] Obviously you want the perpetrators not to offend again but [a repeat offender] has already offended against you, so should you give them a second chance so that they don't offend next time or do you want to see them punished for what they've done to you or to anyone else that's been burgled? The system at the moment doesn't take into account enough the impact on the victims.

Female, Townsville, T10

Repeat offenders then, yeah, you know you've had your chance, you've had warning. Yeah, you need to start getting more punishment, you know, making the community safe, that kind of stuff.

Female, Mount Isa, M12

I had punishment as [the most important purpose of sentencing] for all the repeat offences.

Male, Brisbane, B37

Participants felt that it was important to communicate to first-time offenders that the behaviour was unacceptable, and they should avoid doing it again. This resulted in a shift towards deterrence for first-time offenders. Denunciation (and, for drug offences, rehabilitation) were also seen as ways to reinforce this message and prevent future offending.

For my first-time offenders I sort of put myself in that case and sort of was like oh if I, you know, lost my cool and punched somebody, which can easily happen— you know, so on that I sort of put deterrence more as [the most important purpose of sentencing] because if you get scared enough then, yeah, you aren't going to do it again.

Female, Mount Isa, M12

I put [the most important purpose of sentencing] as punishment. So yeah definitely you do the crime, you do the time. [...] You go and break the law then there's consequences to it and you need to be punished.

Female, Mount Isa, M12

Do the crime. Do the time.

Female, Brisbane, B17

The old saying, you do the crime, you do the time. [...] I thought it sort of meant once you went through the jury and you actually had your say and the ruling came through that's what the sentencing was, it was the end product, so it was like what the punishment was.

Male, Townsville, T18

Sentencing purposes, generally

This section explores participants' general comments about each of the purposes of sentencing. The responses included here are drawn from both activities 1 and 2.

In activity 1, after ranking the importance of sentencing purposes (without any further context), participants were then asked to explain their reasoning.

In activity 2, participants discussed how and why their rankings of sentencing purposes varied across different scenarios. While much of the discussion in activity 2 was scenario-specific, some participants made broader, more general observations about the purposes of sentencing that were not tied to any particular scenario.

These general reflections form the basis of the commentary in this section.

Punishment

In the first activity, one-third of participants (n=23, 34.8%) ranked punishment as the most important purpose of sentencing, making it the most popular of the 5 options.

“Do the crime. Do the time”

Many participants described there being a natural order to justice and crime outcomes, where committing a crime should inevitably lead to consequences. The phrase “Do the crime, do the time” was repeated by several participants, reflecting its resonance as a cultural shorthand. In this sense, participants generally viewed punishment and sentencing as the same thing.

When you say sentencing first thing, initially what comes to mind is punishment.

Female, Townsville, T4

Punishment was seen as a logical response to crime, and the main purpose of the criminal justice system. It was frequently described in terms of accountability, consequence, and reinforcing a basic understanding of right and wrong.

I've got punishment first as a means of holding the person accountable for what they did.

Female, Brisbane, B13

I think punishment comes back to just the most basic understanding of right and wrong.

Female, Townsville, T1

I've got punishment first because I feel like everybody knows the law, so you break the law, you get punished.

Female, Brisbane, B22

They've got to realise that their wrongdoing has a punishment. Your actions have consequences.

Female, Townsville, T5

"I don't think sentencing should be to punish someone"

There was opposition to punishment as the main purpose of sentencing, with 1 in 5 participants rating it as the least important sentencing purpose (n=14, 21.2%). These participants questioned the effectiveness of punishment and the long-term benefits to community.

I had my rose-coloured glasses on when I was doing this and looking at the deepest part of the human spirit in the hope that most people will respond to a positive input. So that's the reason I went the way I've gone with punishment, incidentally, being last of them all.

Male, Townsville, T12

Punishment doesn't ever really make someone want to be better. I find that that's not just in sentencing, in the court, that's just day-to-day life. If I make a mistake and someone yells at me I'm just going to get defensive and be like, no screw you.

Male, Brisbane, B29

Punishment was the [least important purpose of sentencing] because I don't think the sentencing should be to punish someone because they did something wrong. It should be against that state of mind that encourages that kind of unlawful behaviour.

Male, Brisbane, B28

There's probably no amount of punishment that's going to make very much difference.

Female, Townsville, T4

Some participants thought that punishment should be a last resort and only considered after all other purposes of sentencing have been tried.

I put punishment as [the least important purpose of sentencing] because I thought, it's probably better to try and deter it and then, if that doesn't work out, all right. Then you try rehabilitation and then you go denunciation and then I suppose community protection, and then punishment last. I thought it's probably better to try and at least get the individual back into the community and some sort of help and everything, rather than sticking them in jail and saying, well, that's it. Because you're not going to – you're never going to win if you just put them in jail, are you?

Male, Brisbane, B8

When you come down to the punishment, I think the train has already gone, the car's gone, why are we hoping before we come down to the end result and say this is what we're going to do to you, that's the fear factor. We're talking about fear factor here as a motivator. And the fear factor is a great motivator, but attached to it is pain, suffering, and a lack of understanding and before that actually happens, we should be stepping in with some really good people that we have and stopping that. We don't let it happen in the first place.

Male, Mount Isa, M1

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation was ranked as the third most important sentencing purpose overall when considering the single most important purpose (n=10, 15.2%).

Across most scenarios, rehabilitation was ranked as one of the least important purposes. The exception was first-time drug offenders, where rehabilitation featured more prominently as an important sentencing purpose.

For a first-time drug offender, deterrence and rehabilitation were the most commonly prioritised sentencing purposes, with 73% of participants ranking these as most important. However, when presented with a repeat offender for drug possession, the majority of participants shifted their focus to punishment, with two-thirds ranking it as the most important purpose.

For the repeat offender, then I put punishment first, rehabilitation second because obviously the first time didn't work.

Female, Brisbane, B24

Rehabilitation was rarely prioritised for repeat offenders, though a theme emerged from some participants in that repeat offending may indicate a deeper issue requiring rehabilitation.

[For the repeat drug offender], I put rehabilitation. It's like right, this person has got a drug problem, obviously there needs to be an intervention to discourage them for using the drug.

Female, Brisbane, B30

Another participant argued that rehabilitation was the primary purpose of sentencing in all scenarios.

I think the only way we can prevent that [crime], is to rehabilitate and make sure that they are corrected from that kind of behaviour. [...] I think repeated offenders are because of the failure of the rehabilitation. So because the rehabilitation was not done properly or it was not appropriate for them. [...] So probably for the repeat offenders, you also have to try to correct them again. So they're getting their sentence but the purpose should be to rehabilitate them so that they can be reinstated into the society because they are still part of society and we cannot ignore that person's presence in our society. So yeah, so that's why I put rehabilitation for all of them as the [most important] purpose of the sentence.

Male, Brisbane, B28

I put rehabilitation [last], but in action, I honestly believe that if we can change a person's situation and their environment and actually help them with internal trauma, I believe that people's lives can turn around...

But as I said, [it's] probably the least out of all of them that are effective and yet it's probably the most powerful one if we can engage with people to change the environment they go back to.

Male, Townsville, T9

It depends on the crime and the person, but definitely rehabilitation is the important thing if it could happen, realistically, whether in a prison or somewhere else.

Female, Brisbane, B25

However, this view was not shared by other participants.

Across the board for repeat offenders, I had rehab and deterrence at the bottom. Rehab at the bottom because I figured that the likelihood of a repeat offender changing their ways is reduced compared to if you get in earlier. So I'm not - yeah, I'm not so sure that that aim will be easily achieved.

Male, Brisbane, B35

I'm not against rehabilitation, I think it's important, but it's where is it going to be carried out? There's nothing wrong with it—within the prison system if it has to be—but it has to be catered for within the system.

Male, Townsville, T7

“If you can get effective rehabilitation then you can get a productive member of the community”

Some people viewed rehabilitation as playing a vital role in the criminal justice process, capable of turning offenders' lives around. It was seen to provide offenders with a purpose and increase the value gained from sentencing.

If you can get effective rehabilitation then you can get a productive member of the community and that will protect the community and hopefully lead to them being better.

Male, Mount Isa, M13

Some people just don't care. They're just going to keep doing stuff all the time. Whereas one person who might have just done bad life choices, bad situation, he or she may be able to be rehabilitated... So that's a depends on the crime, depends on the person. So you can't blanket rehab everybody.

Female, Brisbane, B11

I think any form of sentencing really needs to be very much about rehabilitation. Because there's no point in locking up a whole bunch of people and making them - doing what you said and making them worse.

Because we're going to lose that whole life's productivity from the people that we put in jail. On top of that, we're paying a lot of money to keep them there.

If our money is spent more on the rehab stuff, we can get them back out and they can start again.

Male, Brisbane, B9

I can't help somebody that can't be helped - like they don't want to be helped.

Male, Townsville, T9

Most of the people who are in prison have had an experience with protective custody as children and that is why they don't want to rehabilitate. Not because they don't want [it] but they don't believe it. They don't believe it's going to happen for them. They don't believe they're going to get that picket fence.

Female, Townsville, T11

If we can help them change their views early, it would be better for everybody, for families, society.

Female, Brisbane, B21

Well, I don't think some of these people can be rehabilitated. They're just hardened criminals and that's it.

Female, Brisbane, B6

“Rehabilitation is the important thing if it could happen, realistically”

Rehabilitation was seen by participants as an idealistic outcome, but participants questioned whether it could be achieved in practice. This led people to question its efficacy, how much weight should be given to its consideration in sentencing, and how best to deliver it.

I don't know, rehabilitation, from what I understand, they need to want to actually change. A lot of them probably - that's all they know so it's going to be harder for them to transition from the crimes and in to - be coming in to like normal citizens.

Male, Townsville, T16

Accountability and repeat offenders

Participants viewed sentencing as primarily about holding a person accountable for their actions. From this perspective,

rehabilitation was seen as the least important purpose of sentencing.

Well rehabilitation for me was [the least important purpose of sentencing] because in this focus group, we're speaking about sentencing. So sentencing means to me the consequences of your actions. Your rehabilitation comes last after that.

Female, Townsville, T5

Rehabilitation for repeat offenders, I tend to put [as less important] because I think the punishment is - people want to see a result. They want to see someone has been arrested, sentenced and they're punished. That's the result that the general public wants. You want to say good; he got two years jail. People want that. So yeah, I guess I'm part of that too.

Male, Brisbane, B19

Rehabilitation becomes further down the line with repeat offenders, in my opinion.

Male, Brisbane, B20

Rehabilitation for drug offences

Rehabilitation was seen as more important in relation to drug offences. Many participants viewed drug use from a self-medicated perspective, and some indicated that they did not consider drug use to be a criminal matter.

I went for rehabilitation [as most important] because, to be honest, I don't think they should be crimes. There [are] far better ways to deal with the problems of drug use.

Male, Mount Isa, M10

It's more - for the drugs, it's more getting the drugs off the street. So, protect the community by taking that person and getting them off that, but not much of a punishment unless you've done it again. Rehabilitate so they know - so the drugs don't keep going through the community into the kids.

Male, Brisbane, B4

Drug offences, I think that's more they're needing rehabilitation.

Female, Brisbane, B7

That person is on a downward path, but how does it affect everyone? I saw that a bit more as an individual scenario. Could you rehab that person?

Female, Brisbane, B10

If I was thinking of drug related crimes, I'd probably put rehabilitation [as the most important purpose of sentencing].

Female, Brisbane, B13

Possessing the dangerous drug. First thing that would - that came to my mind is to discourage them from doing it again and perhaps to rehabilitate them.

Male, Brisbane, B19

I think, especially with drugs, rehabilitation maybe should be [the most important purpose of sentencing].

Female, Brisbane, B32

Rehabilitation, obviously, is a leading factor along with punishment for the drug side of things. So, if someone has been continually offending but not just because they're doing things that are bad but also if they're a person who's experiencing some suffering because they are hooked on something and they cannot let it go even if they want to.

Female, Townsville, T11

Deterrence

Deterrence was viewed as moderately important. Very few participants ranked it as either the most important purpose (n=7, 10.6%) or the least important purpose (n=6, 9.1%).

My [most important purpose of sentencing] was deterrence. If it's not deterred, then the punishment is not relevant if they commit the thing again. So, I just believe that deterrence is the main thing around that and following on with community protection.

Male, Townsville, T7

In the role of the sentencing, if you could deter them the way you described, great, but I thought you would deter that person to not do that offence first. Get involved in sports, get involved in a community club.

I understand what you're saying but when I thought about if a judge was giving a sentence, I put the deterrent as the [least important purpose of sentencing] because they've already done the crime, they've already done something. If we could deter them before they do the crime, that would rank a lot more important for me.

Female, Brisbane, B10

Most participants ranked it somewhere in the middle as either the second (21.2%), third (31.8%) or fourth (27.3%) most important purpose.

Deterrence, pretty consistent across the board being second.

Female, Brisbane, B13

I think you send a strong message to the community in person. So, there was denunciation, deterrence, community protection, punishment and then rehab.

Male, Brisbane, B19

I wanted to protect the community first. Denounce, deter, rehab if it works.

Female, Brisbane, B11

Deterrence comes in two variants: specific deterrence (targeted at the individual offender) and general deterrence (aimed at the general population). Participants were asked to respond to both types of deterrence, with deterrence defined to participants as:

Deterrence

to discourage that person and other people from committing the same type of offence.

Specific deterrence

Specific deterrence was often considered in conjunction with other purposes. Participants believed that individuals were rarely thinking about the consequences of their actions, and that repeat offending was evidence of deterrence not working, therefore ranking it of lesser importance.

Across the board for repeat offenders, I had rehab and deterrence at the bottom.

Male, Brisbane, B29

I don't think that people who commit crimes – certain sorts of crimes – are thinking about the punishment they're going to receive after they do it. Talking about someone who's drunk and committing domestic violence or any sort of violent act in which they're in the heat of the moment, they're not thinking clearly, they're not thinking about anything other than harming the other person. So as a – yeah, I just don't think it rates that highly, a personal thing.

Male, Mount Isa, M2

Participants generally ranked deterrence highly for first-time offenders, discussing the need to deter and prevent future offending. However, for repeat offenders, deterrence generally took a backseat to the other purposes (usually punishment), as it had not worked in the first instance.

So, I mean, if anyone repeats any kind of this offence, it should be punishment straight away. That's what I think. They are already given [the] opportunity to correct themselves in terms of denunciation or deterrence but if they are not realising that then it should be punishment.

Male, Brisbane, B12

For my first-time offenders I sort of put myself in that case and sort of was like oh if I, you know, lost my cool and punched somebody, which can easily happen— you know, so on that I sort of put deterrence more as [the most important purpose of sentencing] because if you get scared enough then, yeah, you aren't going to do it again.

Female, Mount Isa, M12

Other participants viewed specific deterrence as relatively high on importance, viewing it as working hand-in-hand with other purposes.

I put the punishment first because you're actually sentencing a person, so they're punished. Then you're going to deter them afterwards by their punishment.

Female, Brisbane, B2

General deterrence

Participants expressed confidence and support for general deterrence as a proactive tool to broadly address offending behaviours before they start.

I guess I see it's also deterring other people doing it in the first place, not so much for the person because they've done it and they got whatever their issue is. But it's to stop other people heading down the same path.

Male, Mount Isa, M7

Some participants believed that harsh penalties were more likely to deter the general community from committing crime. These participants were generally of a view that if the risks outweighed the rewards, then people would be less likely to offend.

I put in deterrence as [the most important purpose of sentencing] because I think it saves a lot of resources if you deter people from committing crime in the first place. Yeah, so basically, it's to say you've got to pay \$1 million if you're going to commit a crime, it's going to deter a lot of people from committing it in the first place.

Female, Brisbane, B30

I think a lot of young adults think, I'll never get caught. Right? I think we've got to let them know that the punishment will be there if you do it and hopefully that's some deterrent. That was my thinking too. But I think they have the theory that, let's do it, we won't – and it's peer group pressure, some things.

Female, Brisbane, B4

Get into that cell and stay there for 30 to 50 years or until you are dead because you took three lives, so your life is now forfeit. Sorry. I might sound like I'm a harsh person but they are consequences that need to be given to these people to then deter them and others from doing it again.

Female, Townsville, T5

Some participants said that making sentences tougher was needed to stop crime.

If we were in the USA and a burglar broke into my house, I could deter him by pulling my gun on his face. If he tried to attack me, I could shoot and kill him. I'm perfectly entitled to do that. We can't do that here. Thankfully. You're not even allowed bash them up. [...] So yeah, we need to strengthen everything around to just say, no, this is unacceptable behaviour. Don't even start doing this.

Female, Brisbane, B11

In contrast, other participants did not think that sentencing acted as a deterrent as they didn't think people considered the consequences of their actions in the heat of the moment.

To make a person discouraged of committing a crime, you cannot really do that. It's really hard. That is something that people learn along their life, like experience. How do you deter someone from doing that when they're in that heat of the moment stuff? Maybe you can't really deter that sort of stuff because at that point in time, they're not going to be thinking logically, "I wonder what's going to happen if I grab this knife and..."

I put [deterrence] pretty low because I'm not sure how effective it will be to people perhaps who are more likely to be committing these crimes.

Female, Brisbane, B33

“Through parenting, through their schools”

Sentencing, and the imposition of penalties, was not seen as the only way to deter crime. Parenting, schooling, and culture were viewed as mechanisms to deter future offending.

The government needs to be involving the education in primary school and high school and that's how they would prevent the adults to commit a crime or something like that. It's not something that [I think] would be involved in sentencing at all.

Female, Brisbane, B33

But ultimately, you're wanting to deter them from it, and whatever way that happens through education, through culture, through parenting, through their schools – anything to keep them out of how you would want to deter them.

Female, Brisbane, B26

Denunciation

Denunciation was rarely selected as either the most important purpose of sentence (n=7, 10.6%) or the least important purpose of sentencing (n=6, 9.1%). Participants expressed mixed views about its role. Some participants expressed uncertainty about how to interpret it. While some saw it as a fundamental aim of the justice system, others questioned its effectiveness, and others discussed the role it plays in society.

“Telling them tidy their act up”

Participants who tended to prioritise denunciation believed that it was important to publicly declare that certain behaviours are unacceptable. These participants prioritised denunciation because they believed it reinforced societal norms and sent a message to both offenders and the broader community.

Well, I rated denunciation as [the most important purpose of sentencing] because I want whatever the sentencing or the punishment is to say that we as a group say, “well no, you can't do what you've done, and this is going to be your result.”

Male, Townsville, T2

I was pretty high on denunciation all the way through because I think you've got to get that double message across to the person and anyone – his mates watching him, whoever – you've just got to hit it two-fold, I think.

Female, Mount Isa, M11

I've got denunciation [as most important]. I think a person that commits a crime they need to get the message that you're going to have – that we're not going to tolerate that, and the community need to know that, yeah, if I do this, you will be punished.

Female, Townsville, T15

Denunciation. Telling them tidy their act up.

Male, Townsville, T7

Denunciation as an inherent role of the justice system broadly and wasn't as important for sentencing specifically

Participants felt that denunciation represented a fundamental aim and role of the wider criminal justice system and our laws – being hauled before the courts was a denunciation.

This perspective often reduced the importance of denunciation as a distinct sentencing purpose, as they felt the purpose was already being fulfilled by the broader system.

I have denunciation almost – it's [least important] on almost every single one except for the home burglary, because I feel like we have laws. We already know what they are.

Female, Brisbane, B24

We already know what the laws are. So, it's more that you're addressing it as the people that are involved, the victim, the court system and the criminal. So, it should start with that. For me, that's how I looked at it.

Female, Brisbane, B26

I put denunciation and punishment because I think it's really important to go, hey, what are you doing here? Why are you in court for this? You are better than this. You deserve more than this, why are you here? They need to get their name in the paper. Not in a cruel way but in a way that the community goes, hey, did you know Johnno got done for drugs? That's a shame. Like, oh, could you imagine?

Female, Townsville, T13

Concerns about the effectiveness of denunciation

Some participants voiced concerns about how effective denunciation was.

Some cited a lack of access to accurate information about case outcomes or the way the media controlled the narrative. That is, if the message of denunciation doesn't reach the community, then it can't be that effective. A common view was individuals needed to be 'named and shamed' for denunciation to be effective.

Denunciation; I guess I'm over the fact that the media presents the story line in whatever way they want the community to go. So, it's not effective.

Female, Brisbane, B26

Talking about denunciation and yet the number of times somebody's been found guilty in the court here of a serious drug thing or other assault cases, no name is mentioned. [...] I said, why isn't it going in the newspaper? Oh well, want to give them a chance to rehabilitate. So, they might put denunciation as one of the clauses, but they don't carry through necessarily.

Male, Mount Isa, M6

[Speaking about one-punch assaults] It was in the media all the time. Then the punishments that were handed out, I think were the denunciation and it changed. There were a few incidences but then we never heard about it anymore. [...] So, everyone knows what a king hit punch is now, but I don't think we've seen it in the media as much as what it has been. Maybe it still happens, and it just doesn't get reported. I think somebody said earlier, we only know about sentencing when it's in the news. I don't know if king hit punches are still happening but maybe we just don't hear about it?

Female, Brisbane, B10

I think it's going back to that denunciation thing, too. That it's sending a message out to society that it's not acceptable, but I think what most of us hear or what we hear in the media, you know, that people just get a slap on the wrist for breaking in where in effect, I put five per cent. I didn't realise it was anywhere near that because you sort of hear this, oh, you know, they broke in and got a slap on the wrist and were sent off, you know?

Female, Brisbane, B31

Reduced social cohesion makes denunciation less important

Some participants noted that reduced social cohesion and changes in family and community structures have made people less concerned about public disapproval. Some noted that that denunciation was ineffective for certain groups, such as adults who were less influenced by societal pressure. Overall, this was seen as diminishing the effectiveness of denunciation as a sentencing purpose.

With regards to adults, they're beyond that pressure of denunciation of the crimes.

Female, Brisbane, B26

Denunciation, people don't care what they think of them anymore so yeah, it's [the least important purpose of sentencing].

Female, Townsville, T5

We've had entire breakdowns of the family nucleus and everybody becoming more segregated in regard to cultures and religions or schooling. So, I find that denunciation, from my opinion of the word, doesn't seem to have the same effect as it did when we were growing up.

Female, Brisbane, B26

Overall, denunciation was often identified as the least important of the sentencing purposes. However, they also acknowledged its importance in sending a strong message about societal values and expectations. While some saw it as a fundamental role of the justice system, others questioned its effectiveness or relevance in today's society.

Community protection

Community protection was generally ranked highly by participants across most scenarios. In activity 1, it was ranked as the most important purpose of sentencing by 18 participants (27.3%), making it the second most important sentencing outcome, closely behind punishment. Its

importance often increased in scenarios involving repeat offenders, as participants believed repeat offending indicated a heightened risk of future harm and the need to prioritise protecting the community.

A key purpose of sentencing

Protecting the community and keeping people safe from harm was seen as a fundamental role of the criminal justice system. Unlike denunciation (where denunciation was seen as the purpose of the system more broadly, and not as relevant to sentencing specifically), community protection was seen as a fundamental purpose of sentencing itself. Participants described community protection as a 'big picture' goal that underpinned the entire justice system.

I put community protection [as the most important purpose of sentencing] and the reason is, it's the big picture, not the small picture because the community is the driver.

Male, Mount Isa, M1

I just think if you're going to have this whole system, the main reason for it is to protect people from violent offenders or dangerous individuals.

Male, Mount Isa, M10

Yeah, the second [most important purpose of sentencing] is the community protection because of course the community needs to be protected from that kind of behaviour and sentencing should be yep, it just follows.

Male, Brisbane, B28

Community protection through incapacitation

The ability to live safely and feel secure was seen as a fundamental right that the criminal justice system was designed to uphold. As such, incapacitation (that is, removing offenders from the community by holding them in confinement) was identified as a legitimate and necessary means of achieving community protection. For many, this was closely tied to punishment, with incarceration seen as a way to both protect the community and hold offenders accountable.

I think the most important [purpose of sentencing for the repeat offender] is community protection. Obviously, they don't care about the punishment so they need to be kept away from the community. [...] I think the community protection in our society is putting them in jail for a longer period and that's equated to punishment. I think they're one and the same.

Male, Townsville, T6

I suppose I'm looking at punishment almost as community protection. They need to be locked away.

Male, Mount Isa, M6

[The second most important purpose of sentencing] was community protection so if you take them out of the system, it's got to be better for the community.

Male, Brisbane, B34

Community protection was more important where harm was greater

Participants were particularly concerned with actions that posed a risk to children. These evoked a greater sense of the need for community protection to be a priority at sentencing. Removing offenders who posed a danger to children or committed violent crimes was seen as essential to safeguarding the community.

So, for example, community protection would be someone who habitually would be sexually assaulting children.

Female, Townsville, T13

So, for me, possessing a dangerous drug in the first instance was to protect the community, protect our young people.

Female, Townsville, T5

I had community protection as [the most important purpose of sentencing] on the basis that - and I'm thinking of particularly of crimes like people who murder or sexual predators, paedophiles, that sort of stuff, right? Whereby removing such people from the community, you are essentially protecting everyone.

Male, Brisbane, B35

Community protection prioritises the needs of victim survivors

There was a sense among the participants that how the law looks at and responds to crime is offender focused. Community protection was seen as a way of prioritising the needs of the victim survivor, while proactively taking steps to reduce the number of new victims.

Yeah, I've got community protection as [the most important purpose of sentencing]. [...] One of the biggest problems that we've got is that law actually isn't for the victim, it's for the perpetrator. In other words, the victim has absolutely no rights whatsoever. [...] Which means there's no other recourse for society if [the offender] isn't put into a situation where they can no longer do any harm.

Male, Townsville, T9

Everyone could be a potential victim or related to or friends of a potential victim if that such a criminal is left in the community. So, I felt that that has potentially the widest impact. So that's why I've put that as [the most important purpose of sentencing].

Male, Brisbane, B35

DISCUSSION

The community's views on the purposes of sentencing were diverse and shaped by a wide range of factors. Participants' rankings of sentencing purposes varied depending on the type of offence, whether the perpetrator was a repeat offender, and contextual factors such as the perceived harm caused by the offence, the underlying causes of offending, and the perceived wrongness of the behaviour. These factors interacted in complex ways, leading to significant variation in how participants prioritised sentencing purposes.

In the absence of specific contextual information, participants tended to 'fill in the blanks' by imagining scenarios that reflected their own assumptions or experiences. For example, when asked to rank sentencing purposes without any offence or offender context, participants drew on a wide range of imagined scenarios, from high-profile cases involving serious crimes like murder or sexual offending to disadvantaged young offenders or minor offences.

These imagined contexts influenced how participants assessed the purposes of sentencing, resulting in highly diverse rankings when no specific context was provided. Every sentencing purpose was ranked as both the most and the least important by at least 10% of participants, reflecting the wide range of perspectives and the variety of scenarios participants envisioned.

Despite this diversity, punishment and community protection emerged as the most commonly prioritised sentencing purposes overall. When participants were later presented with specific offence scenarios, some of this variation reduced. However, the extent to which variation decreased depended on the scenario and the factors being considered.

Contextual factors such as the type of offence and whether the offender was a repeat offender had a noticeable impact on how participants ranked the purposes of sentencing. When asked to consider a first-time offender, drug possession was associated with a focus on rehabilitation, assault had a focus on punishment and denunciation, and burglary had a focus on punishment and community protection. Deterrence featured prominently across all offences. For each offence, repeat offending consistently shifted participants' priorities towards punishment and community protection, often overpowering differences between offence types.

Discussions with participants revealed that their rankings were shaped by deeper considerations of contextual factors. These included the perceived harm caused by the offence, the underlying causes of offending (e.g., addiction or disadvantage), and the perceived wrongness of the behaviour (e.g., breaches of social norms). These factors

provided insight into the reasoning behind participants' rankings and highlighted the complexity of community perspectives on sentencing purposes.

Overview of findings

The overall findings from this study are set out below.

FINDING 1

The type of offence influences community views on sentencing purposes.

Participants' rankings of sentencing purposes were influenced by the type of offence. This was evident in both activity 1 (where participants ranked purposes without specific context) and activity 2 (where they ranked purposes for specific offence scenarios).

In activity 1, participants' rankings varied depending on the offence or offender they had in mind. Those who thought of serious offences, such as murder or sexual offending, prioritised community protection and punishment. In contrast, participants who considered disadvantaged young offenders tended to focus on rehabilitation and denunciation. Those who thought about a mix of crime types showed greater diversity in their rankings.

In activity 2, the offence type provided in each scenario clearly shaped participants' priorities:

Drug possession: Participants focused on deterrence and rehabilitation, with less emphasis on punishment or community protection, particularly for first time offenders.

Assault causing injury: Participants prioritised deterrence, punishment, and denunciation, reflecting the perceived harm and wrongness of violence.

Burglary: Participants emphasised deterrence, community protection and punishment, viewing the offence as a violation of personal safety and community trust.

This aligns with the findings of a previous study which showed that when participants were provided with specific information about offences, their views on sentencing purposes changed.³⁶

³⁶ Moritz, Pearson and Mitchell (n 11) 4.

FINDING 2

Community views on sentencing purposes are heavily influenced by the offender's status as a repeat offender, often overpowering differences by offence type.

Participants were much more likely to rank punishment as the most important purpose of sentencing when presented with a repeat offender. Community protection also increased in importance across all scenarios, although this effect was less pronounced for drug possession.

Participants who ranked punishment as more important tended to view repeat offending as a failure of the perpetrator to respond to earlier interventions, which reinforced the need for stronger punitive measures.

Participants who ranked community protection as more important indicated that they perceived repeat offenders to pose a higher risk of future harm to the community. For those individuals, it was important for sentencing to keep the community safe from ongoing offending.

These findings are in line with previous research, where the public's sentencing attitudes have been more lenient towards first-time offenders.³⁷ Prior research has found public support for using a more rehabilitative approach generally, and in particular for young and first-time offenders.³⁸ Personal mitigations, such as a previously clean record, have been more likely to garner sympathetic views from the public and worked in the favour of first-time offenders.³⁹ Also in line with previous research is the finding that participants felt that repeat offenders deserved to be punished, and that the community needed to be protected from them.⁴⁰

FINDING 3

Perceptions about the degree and scope of harm caused by the offence influenced community views on sentencing purposes.

Participants' views on sentencing purposes were shaped by their perceptions about who was harmed by the offence and the extent of that harm.

When participants viewed the harm as limited to the individual who committed the offence, they tended to prioritise deterrence and rehabilitation, while deprioritising punishment and community protection.

In contrast, when participants saw the offence as having broader community impacts, they placed greater emphasis

on community protection and punishment, while also recognising the need for deterrence.

Similarly, the perceived degree of harm had a similar effect, with perceptions of low harm leading to prioritisation of deterrence and rehabilitation, and perceptions of high harm leading to community protection, punishment, and deterrence.

For example, drug possession was often seen as a personal issue, with limited consequences for others. Participants who held this view prioritised deterrence and rehabilitation. On the other hand, participants who viewed drug possession as a broader community issue, such as exposing young people to drugs or contributing to further crimes, prioritised community protection and punishment.

Some participants downplayed the seriousness of drug offending, seeing it as a personal choice that should not involve the criminal justice system. These participants prioritised rehabilitation and deterrence over punishment. Others, however, viewed drug possession as a serious offence with real consequences, such as its impact on families and communities or its potential to lead to other types of offending. These participants prioritised punishment and deterrence.

Offences like assault and burglary were seen as having significant community impacts.

Assault was described as a serious and unpredictable crime that could happen to anyone, generating fear and a desire to ensure public safety through punishment, community protection, and deterrence.

Burglary was viewed as more than a property offence, with participants emphasising its impact on personal safety and community trust. The fear of further victimisation and the long-term consequences of burglary led to a strong focus on community protection and punishment, alongside deterrence.

Interestingly, participants in earlier studies had tended to prioritise rehabilitation for first-time burglary offenders, which was not the case in this study.⁴¹ One explanation for this might be the changing public attitudes towards, and tolerance for, burglary as an invasive crime, as described by our participants.

³⁷ Gelb (n 5) 19; Roberts and Hough (n 22) 186; Spiranovic et al (n 8) 298.

³⁸ Gelb (n 5) 19; Craig GA Jones and Don J Weatherburn, 'Willingness to Pay for Rehabilitation Versus Punishment to Reduce Adult and Juvenile Crime' (2011) 46(1) *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 9; Paul L Simpson and Tony Butler, 'Assessing the Public's Views on Prison and Prison Alternatives: Findings from Public Deliberation Research in Three Australian Cities' (2015) 11(2) *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*; Spiranovic et al (n 8) 296.

³⁹ Roberts and Hough (n 22) 187.

⁴⁰ Spiranovic et al (n 8) 301.

⁴¹ Gelb (n 5) 13; Spiranovic et al (n 8) 297.

FINDING 4

Participants' views on the collective societal view of the wrongness of the offence influenced their preference for punishment as a sentencing purpose.

Participants often linked their preference for punishment with their perception of the moral wrongness of the offence. Offences perceived as clear breaches of social norms or basic behavioural expectations evoked strong feelings of outrage and a belief that offenders should face consequences. This retributive view underpinned participants' prioritisation of punishment.

For example, participants described violence, such as assault, as something everyone knows is wrong. They emphasised that offenders should expect to face consequences for their actions, reflecting a belief that society has made it clear that violence is unacceptable.

Similarly, burglary was seen as a clear breach of social norms, with participants expressing frustration and anger at the idea of someone invading another's space and taking what they had worked hard for. It was also seen as a deliberate and premeditated act, which was viewed as increasing the offender's culpability. This heightened sense of outrage led to a strong preference for punishment, as participants believed it was necessary to hold offenders accountable and reinforce societal expectations.

FINDING 5

Participants who focused on the underlying causes of offending tended to prioritise rehabilitation and deprioritise punishment.

While rehabilitation was ranked by participants as the third most important purpose overall (when asked without any scenario context provided), its ranking varied across scenarios. Rehabilitation was only ranked highly in the scenario involving a first-time drug offender. This section provides the perspective of those who did prioritise rehabilitation as an important sentencing purpose.

These participants considered the underlying causes of offending when ranking sentencing purposes. For those who believed that offending stemmed from issues such as addiction or disadvantage, rehabilitation was prioritised as a way to address these root causes and prevent future harm.

For example, drug possession was frequently framed as a health issue requiring treatment rather than punishment. Participants who held this view prioritised rehabilitation, seeing it as a way to help offenders overcome addiction and reduce the broader harms associated with drug use.

This aligns with previous sentencing literature which has shown that rehabilitation and deterrence have been favoured in response to drug offences.⁴²

Similarly, some participants believed that violent behaviour, such as assault, indicated underlying emotional or psychological problems. For these participants, rehabilitation was seen as essential to addressing the root causes of violence and preventing future offending. Even for offences like burglary, which evoked strong feelings about harm and community safety, some participants believed that first-time offenders should be given an opportunity to reform through rehabilitation.

However, for repeat offenders, participants shifted their focus towards punishment and community protection, reflecting a belief that rehabilitation was less effective for those who continued to offend.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to get a better understanding of the community's views about the importance of each of the purposes of sentencing in Queensland.

The findings showed that no single sentencing purpose held overall importance. Although punishment and community protection were favoured most often. Each sentencing purpose was deemed more or less appropriate under different conditions.

Participants tended to consider factors such as the perceived risk of harm posed by the offence and whether the offence was clearly and deliberately committed in violation of societal norms. While a small number of participants prioritised addressing the underlying causes of offending behaviour, others did not see this as something sentencing could effectively achieve.

It is important to note that an additional purpose of sentencing was introduced from 1 November 2025 to recognise the harm done by the offender to a victim of the offence. This purpose was not in effect at the time this research was undertaken, and as such, the relative importance of victim harm as a sentencing purpose remains unknown.

The findings of this study suggest that public views on the importance of victim harm as a sentencing purpose may vary depending on the perceived scope and degree of harm caused by the offence (see Finding 3 above). For offences perceived to cause a high degree of harm, particularly those with broader community impacts, it is possible that victim harm may be prioritised alongside purposes such as community protection, punishment, and deterrence. Future research could explore how the introduction of this new purpose influences public perceptions of sentencing priorities.

⁴² Judy Paulin, Wendy Searle and Trish Knaggs, *Attitudes to Crime and Punishment: A New Zealand Study* (Ministry of Justice, 2003) 60 ('*Attitudes to Crime and Punishment*'); Warner et al (n 10).

APPENDIX: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The following verbal instructions were provided to participants for the first activity.

[Activity 1 – preamble]

In Queensland, there are five reasons that we sentence people: just punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation, denunciation, and community protection.

We sentence people

- to **punish** them for something they did,
- to **rehabilitate** people to help change their behaviour and stop them committing crimes,
- to **deter** that person and other people from committing crime in the first place,
- to **denounce** criminal behaviour and send a strong message that it won't be tolerated,
- and to **protect the community** from the offender.

I'm going to hand out a sheet with a list of these reasons for sentencing people. We'd like you to take a moment to consider which of these reasons are the most important when sentencing crime. Please rank these from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important reason for sentencing people, and 5 being the lowest. There are no right or wrong answers; we are asking you for your personal views.

After you complete the ranking, I would like to discuss the things you considered.

Figure 3: Focus group questionnaire – Activity 1 – Importance of sentencing purposes

Purposes of sentencing

Number the boxes from 1 to 5 in the order of your choice.

Punishment
to punish the offender in a way that is just.

Rehabilitation
to help a person change their behaviour so they don't commit a crime again.

Deterrence
to discourage that person and other people from committing the same type of offence.

Denunciation
to send a strong message to the person and community that the offender's behaviour won't be tolerated.

Community protection
to protect the Queensland community from the offender.

The following prompts were included in the facilitator's guide to generate discussion following the first activity.

[Activity 1 - Discussion]

Does anyone want to start the discussion by sharing what you think the most important reason for sentencing someone is?

[Prompt] When you ranked this as the most important purpose, did you have a particular type of offence or offender in mind?

[Optional] What made you rank this as most important?

[Optional] Did anyone rank something else as the most important purpose?

[Optional] It seems that no one ranked [insert purpose] as important, why was this?

[Optional] Which of these reasons do you think is the least important? Why?

The following verbal instructions were provided to participants for the second activity.

[Activity 2]

I'm going to hand out some more sheets, and I want to repeat this exercise a few more times, but this time I'm going to read out 6 different scenarios, and for each scenario, I want you to rank how important you think each reason is.

You will not be asked to share with the group how you ranked the cases – your answers are confidential. However, after completing the ranking I would like to discuss the things you considered.

[Scenario 1: Possessing dangerous drugs – first time offender]

For scenario 1, I want you to consider an adult who is being sentenced for the first time for possessing a dangerous drug. For example, this could be someone caught carrying something like methamphetamines, which you might have heard of as crystal meth or ice. Which of these reasons do you think is more important when sentencing this person?

[Scenario 2: Possessing dangerous drugs – repeat offender]

For scenario 2, I want you to consider an adult repeat offender sentenced for possessing a dangerous drug. This is not the first time this person has committed this crime.

Figure 4: Focus group questionnaire – Activity 2A – Importance of sentencing purposes for drug possession

Activity 2
Your name: _____

Number the boxes from 1 to 5 in the order of your choice.

Scenario 1	Scenario 2
Possessing a dangerous drug First time offender	Possessing a dangerous drug Repeat offender
<input type="checkbox"/> Punishment to punish the offender in a way that is just.	<input type="checkbox"/> Punishment to punish the offender in a way that is just.
<input type="checkbox"/> Rehabilitation to help a person change their behaviour so they don't commit a crime again.	<input type="checkbox"/> Rehabilitation to help a person change their behaviour so they don't commit a crime again.
<input type="checkbox"/> Deterrence to discourage that person and other people from committing the same type of offence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Deterrence to discourage that person and other people from committing the same type of offence.
<input type="checkbox"/> Denunciation to send a strong message to the person and community that the offender's behaviour won't be tolerated.	<input type="checkbox"/> Denunciation to send a strong message to the person and community that the offender's behaviour won't be tolerated.
<input type="checkbox"/> Community protection to protect the Queensland community from the offender.	<input type="checkbox"/> Community protection to protect the Queensland community from the offender.

[Scenario 3: AOBH – first time offender]

For scenario 3, I want you to consider an adult who is being sentenced for the first time for punching someone in the face and causing bruising and a fractured nose.

[Scenario 4: AOBH – repeat offender]

For scenario 4, consider an adult repeat offender who is being sentenced for punching someone in the face and causing bruising and a fractured nose.

Figure 5: Focus group questionnaire – Activity 2B – Importance of sentencing purposes for assault causing injury

Activity 2

Number the boxes from 1 to 5 in the order of your choice.

Scenario 3	Scenario 4
Assault causing injury First time offender	Assault causing injury Repeat offender
<input type="checkbox"/> Punishment to punish the offender in a way that is just.	<input type="checkbox"/> Punishment to punish the offender in a way that is just.
<input type="checkbox"/> Rehabilitation to help a person change their behaviour so they don't commit a crime again.	<input type="checkbox"/> Rehabilitation to help a person change their behaviour so they don't commit a crime again.
<input type="checkbox"/> Deterrence to discourage that person and other people from committing the same type of offence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Deterrence to discourage that person and other people from committing the same type of offence.
<input type="checkbox"/> Denunciation to send a strong message to the person and community that the offender's behaviour won't be tolerated.	<input type="checkbox"/> Denunciation to send a strong message to the person and community that the offender's behaviour won't be tolerated.
<input type="checkbox"/> Community protection to protect the Queensland community from the offender.	<input type="checkbox"/> Community protection to protect the Queensland community from the offender.

[Scenario 5: Burglary – first time offender]

For scenario 5, I want you to consider an adult who is being sentenced for the first time for home burglary. When we say burglary, we mean a person breaking into someone’s home to steal something, such as laptops, jewellery or other items.

[Scenario 6: Burglary – repeat offender]

For scenario 6, consider an adult repeat offender who is being sentenced for home burglary.

Figure 6: Focus group questionnaire – Activity 2C – Importance of sentencing purposes for home burglary

Activity 2

Number the boxes from 1 to 5 in the order of your choice.

Scenario 5	Scenario 6
Home burglary First time offender	Home burglary Repeat offender
<input type="checkbox"/> Punishment to punish the offender in a way that is just.	<input type="checkbox"/> Punishment to punish the offender in a way that is just.
<input type="checkbox"/> Rehabilitation to help a person change their behaviour so they don't commit a crime again.	<input type="checkbox"/> Rehabilitation to help a person change their behaviour so they don't commit a crime again.
<input type="checkbox"/> Deterrence to discourage that person and other people from committing the same type of offence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Deterrence to discourage that person and other people from committing the same type of offence.
<input type="checkbox"/> Denunciation to send a strong message to the person and community that the offender's behaviour won't be tolerated.	<input type="checkbox"/> Denunciation to send a strong message to the person and community that the offender's behaviour won't be tolerated.
<input type="checkbox"/> Community protection to protect the Queensland community from the offender.	<input type="checkbox"/> Community protection to protect the Queensland community from the offender.

The following prompt was included in the facilitator’s guide to generate discussion following the second activity.

[Discussion]

I’m keen to hear from you what factors you were thinking about when you were ranking these scenarios. Could I ask each of you around the room to just say a few words about how you tackled that exercise to come up with the ranking that you did.

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Content from this research brief should be attributed as – 'Community views on the importance of sentencing purposes', Research Brief No. 4, Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council, January 2026.

ISBN: 978-0-6452082-9-0