

## RESEARCH IMPACT

### Improving police responses to 'mass shooting' incidents

A collaboration between the NSW Police Force and Charles Sturt University



Charles Sturt  
University



***"... 'The [report] was the starting point in a journey that has seen [NSWPF] train more than 10,000 people in the AAO tactics'"***

Superintendent Mark Hiron, NSW Police

## Challenge

How police respond to active armed offenders (AAO) during mass shootings is a significant community safety issue. In 2014 the NSW Police Force identified that their existing 'contain and negotiate' response policy was not appropriate for such incidents. The NSWPF approached Charles Sturt University to provide evidence-based recommendations to improve police responses to AAO incidents.

## Discovery

The research was led by A/Prof Gene Hodgins and Prof Anthony Saliba. The research aimed to identify what makes a situation an 'active shooter' incident; the characteristics of previous 'active shooter' incidents, how they were dealt with, what was found to work; and current 'best practice' for police in dealing effectively with an 'active shooter' incident.

## Impact

The research recommended new rapid response training, and the use of appropriate firearms and protective equipment. The NSWPF adopted the recommendations and then trained over 10,000 officers in the new AAO tactics and implemented a new firearms policy. Other Police jurisdictions have also used the recommendations.

In 2014 the NSW Police Force (NSWPF) assessed that its broadly implemented, conventional 'contain and negotiate' strategy was not appropriate in Active Armed Offender (AAO) situations. At this time, the NSWPF approached Charles Sturt University Psychology researchers Associate Professor Gene Hodgins and Professor Anthony Saliba to conduct an international literature review, to identify worlds-best-practice and provide the NSWPF with evidence-based recommendations for how police should respond to 'active shooter' incidents.

The Charles Sturt University research team made several evidence-based recommendations in the report. These included that a clear 'active shooter' policy and procedure was required by the NSWPF to guide their members responses to 'active shooter' incidents, and that this policy and procedure should encapsulate that police first responders actively seek to neutralize the offender only after being given appropriate training (such as from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Texas State University ALERRT (Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training)) and access to appropriate resources (e.g. firearms and protective equipment).

The impact of the Charles Sturt University report has been reflected in a number of areas. For example, A/Prof Hodgins was invited to give a keynote address to the national police 'Operational Safety and Skills Conference' in 2015 that was attended by the Operational Safety & Skills section of every police force in Australia and New Zealand, including the Commander of the Operational Safety and Skills Command of NSWPF, as well as an Acting Assistant Commissioner of NSWPF, and representatives from the Police Association of NSW.

Secondly, an article summarising the report was published in the 'Australian Police Journal' in 2015, which is published on behalf of the Police Commissioners of Australia and has over 22,000 subscribers. The article's popularity led to it being reprinted in two further significant Australian police journals in 2015, namely 'Australasian Policing', which is distributed to every police station in Australia and to police members of the Australasian Institute of Policing, and 'The Police Association Victoria Journal', which is distributed to approximately 14,000 members of Victoria Police. The research was also presented at the Australian and New Zealand Society for Evidence-Based Policing Conference in 2015, and the NSW Police Commissioner's executive team.

## 'Best practice' response

Superintendent Mark Hiron, Commander of the Operational Safety and Skills Command with the NSWPF, summarised the impact of the research as:

***"The [report] was the starting point in a journey that has seen [NSWPF] train more than 10,000 people in the AAO tactics. We have had two visits from ALERRT [Texas State University] and FBI who have trained our instructors and evaluated our contextualisation of the ALERRT program. The document has been used by every other Australasian policing agency to inform them on what their training needs looked like. It has even convinced our Executive to progress to long arms for first responders and we are working on that program at the moment."***



***"All police jurisdictions in Australia have now used the report and recommendations to inform changes in their training."***

Superintendent Mark Hiron, NSW Police



## Safer Communities

How police respond during mass shootings or vehicle mass deaths is a significant community safety issue. This is illustrated unfortunately through tragic events worldwide. In each situation, general duties police are among the first on-site and their response is crucial to protect the public against further threat. The Charles Sturt University research substantially influenced NSWPF training procedures, policy, and resource allocation, including a significant alteration in firearms policy, at significant expense and procedural change, with state and nationwide implications for the training of police personnel and the safety of the community.

## Program Highlights

- The existing NSWPF 'contain and negotiate' strategy was not appropriate
- Charles Sturt University researchers developed recommendations for 'best practice' response to active armed offender incidents
- Recommendations from the research were adopted by NSWPF and other Australian jurisdictions
- Over 10,000 officers were trained in the new procedures
- Research led to a new firearms policy

***"The research substantially influenced police training procedures, policy and resource allocation, which ultimately impacts the safety of Australian communities"***

A/Prof Gene Hodgins

More information is available at:

<https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/en/persons/ghodginscsueduau>

## Funding and Collaborators

Research into how police respond to 'active armed offenders' developed from Charles Sturt's long-standing relationship with the NSWPF as its education provider. The NSWPF funded the collaborative research.

The research strongly engaged with the NSWPF who co-developed aims and objectives, and provided access to resources. Without such engagement the research would not have been possible.

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