

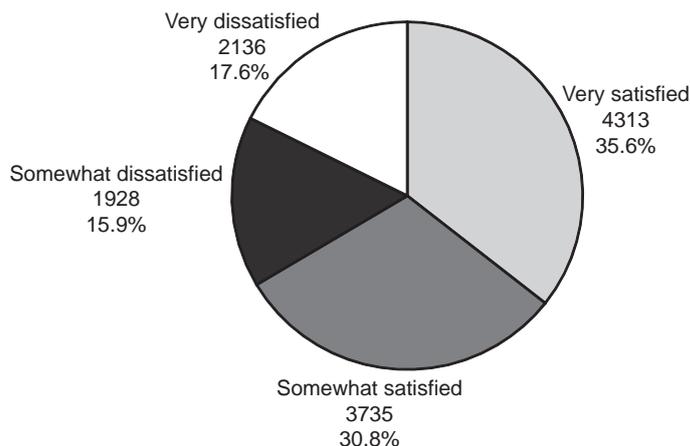
8. Outcome of legal problems

As noted earlier, of the 19 388 legal problems followed up in depth in the Australian sample, 12 327 were finalised at the time of interview.¹ This chapter examines the respondents' satisfaction with the outcomes of these finalised problems, whether favourable outcomes were achieved, and the problem and demographic characteristics associated with achieving favourable outcomes.

Satisfaction with outcome of legal problems

For each of the 12 327 legal problems reported as finalised, respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the outcome of the problem (see Appendix A1, question A37). Figure 8.1 shows that respondents reported being 'very satisfied' with the outcomes of 35.6 per cent of finalised legal problems and 'somewhat satisfied' with the outcomes of a further 30.8 per cent of finalised legal problems. Thus, combining these percentages, respondents indicated being satisfied to some extent with the outcomes of approximately two-thirds (66.4%) of finalised legal problems.

Figure 8.1: Satisfaction with outcome of legal problems, Australia

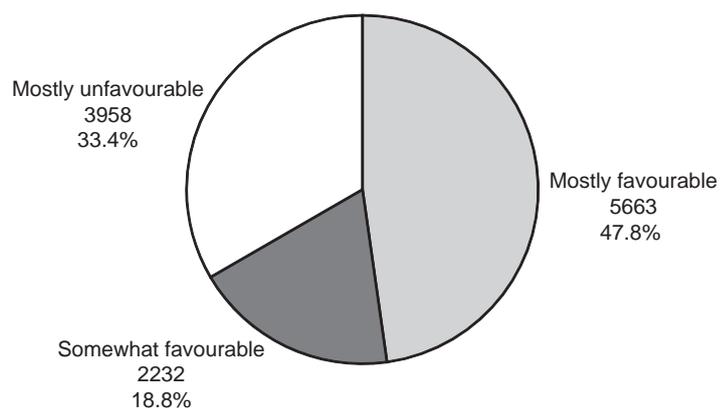


Note: N=12 110 finalised problems. Data were missing for 217 problems.

Favourability of outcome of legal problems

In addition, respondents were asked about the extent to which the outcome of each legal problem was in their favour and were asked to choose between 'mostly in my favour', 'somewhat in my favour' and 'mostly not in my favour' (see Appendix A1, question A36). The results for favourability of outcome are displayed in Figure 8.2 and are very similar to those for satisfaction with outcome in Figure 8.1. Just as respondents reported being satisfied with the outcomes of approximately two-thirds of problems, they also reported outcomes that were favourable to some extent for two-thirds of problems (66.6%). This percentage of 66.6 comprises 47.8 per cent of problems where the outcome was reported to be 'mostly' in the respondent's favour, and a further 18.8 per cent of problems where the outcome was reported to be 'somewhat' in the respondent's favour.

¹ As a result of rounding weighted data, some numbers and percentages in the report do not sum precisely to totals.

Figure 8.2: Favourability of outcome of legal problems, Australia

Note: N=11 853 finalised problems. Data were missing for 475 problems.

As might be expected, there was an extremely strong significant relationship between achieving favourable outcomes for legal problems and being satisfied with those outcomes. Satisfaction with outcomes decreased as perceived favourability of outcomes decreased (see Table 8.1). For example, respondents reported outcomes that were mostly in their favour for 87.0 per cent of the problems where they were very satisfied with the outcomes, and they reported outcomes that were mostly not in their favour for 89.8 per cent of the problems where they were very dissatisfied with the outcomes.

The rest of this chapter examines whether achieving favourable outcomes for legal problems is related to various problem and demographic characteristics. In each case, legal problems with ‘favourable’ outcomes (i.e. outcomes reported as being ‘mostly’ or ‘somewhat’ in the respondent’s favour) are compared to legal problems with ‘unfavourable’ outcomes (i.e. outcomes reported as ‘mostly not’ in the respondent’s favour).²

The relationship between the favourability of the outcomes achieved for legal problems and the severity of legal problems is displayed in Figure 8.3. This relationship was significant, with problems of substantial impact being more likely than problems of minor impact to result in unfavourable outcomes (37.8% versus 30.6%).

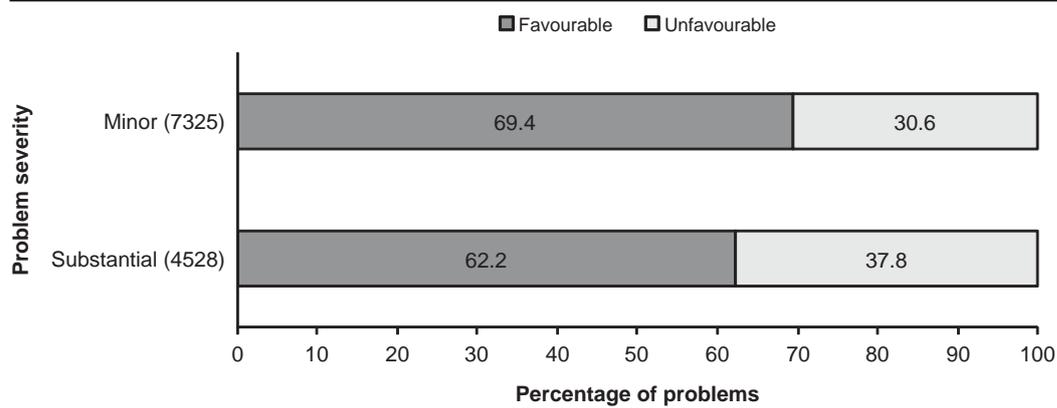
The relationship between the favourability of the outcomes achieved for legal problems and the number of adverse consequences caused by these legal problems is displayed in Table 8.2. This

Table 8.1: Favourability of outcome of legal problems by satisfaction with outcome, Australia

Favourability of outcome	Satisfaction with outcome				All finalised problems
	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	
	%	%	%	%	
Mostly favourable	87.0	46.6	9.8	6.1	47.9
Somewhat favourable	8.1	38.3	22.3	4.1	18.9
Mostly unfavourable	4.8	15.1	67.9	89.8	33.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	N	4 193	3 589	1 877	2 103
					11 762

Note: N=11 762 finalised problems. Data were missing for 565 problems. Somers’ d=0.61 (95% CI=0.60–0.62), SE=0.01, p=0.000, outcome variable is satisfaction with outcome.

² Given the very strong similarity between favourability of outcome and satisfaction with outcome, analyses on the relationships between satisfaction with outcome and various problem and demographic variables are not reported.

Figure 8.3: Favourability of outcome of legal problems by problem severity, Australia

Note: N=11 853 finalised problems. Data were missing for 475 problems. $\chi^2=65.99$, $F_{1,10320}=40.89$, $p=0.000$.

Table 8.2: Favourability of outcome of legal problems by number of adverse consequences of legal problems, Australia

Favourability of outcome	Number of adverse consequences per problem					All finalised problems %
	0 %	1 %	2 %	3 %	4+ %	
Favourable	70.5	61.5	61.2	54.0	57.9	66.6
Unfavourable	29.5	38.5	38.8	46.0	42.1	33.4
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	7 342	2 719	1 007	515	264	11 847

Note: N=11 847 finalised problems. Data were missing for 480 problems. Somers' $d=0.11$ (95% CI=0.09–0.14), SE=0.01, $p=0.000$, outcome variable is favourability of outcome.

relationship was significant, with the likelihood of favourable outcomes decreasing as the number of adverse consequences caused by legal problems increased. For example, 70.5 per cent of the problems without adverse consequences had favourable outcomes compared to 57.9 per cent of the problems with four or more adverse consequences.

The relationship between achieving a favourable outcome for a legal problem and the total number of legal problems experienced by the respondent during the 12-month reference period was also examined (see Table 8.3). This relationship was weak but significant, with the likelihood of achieving a favourable outcome decreasing as the number of legal problems experienced by the respondent increased. For example, 69.6 per cent of all problems experienced by respondents who had only one or two problems resulted in favourable outcomes compared to 61.9 per cent of all problems experienced by respondents who had six or more problems.

Table 8.3: Favourability of outcome of legal problems by number of legal problems per respondent, Australia

Favourability of outcome	Number of problems per respondent			All finalised problems %
	1–2 %	3–5 %	6+ %	
Favourable	69.6	67.2	61.9	66.6
Unfavourable	30.4	32.8	38.1	33.4
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	4 834	3 528	3 491	11 853

Note: N=11 853 finalised problems. Data were missing for 475 problems. Somers' $d=0.08$ (95% CI=0.05–0.10), SE=0.01, $p=0.000$, outcome variable is favourability of outcome.

There was a significant relationship between achieving favourable outcomes for legal problems and the manner in which the problems were finalised, as shown in Table 8.4. This significant relationship largely reflected a considerably higher rate of unfavourable outcomes for legal problems that were finalised by the respondent deciding not to pursue the matter further than for legal problems finalised by other means (68.4% versus 33.4% on average).

Table 8.4: Favourability of outcome of legal problems by manner of finalisation of legal problems, Australia

<i>Manner of finalisation^a</i>	<i>Favourability of outcome</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>N</i>
	<i>Favourable</i>	<i>Unfavourable</i>		
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	
Court or tribunal	74.1	25.9	100.0	402
Dispute resolution or complaint-handling body ^b	81.9	18.1	100.0	399
Another agency	80.8	19.2	100.0	1 746
Lawyer's or someone else's help ^c	83.4	16.6	100.0	757
Agreement with other side	84.3	15.7	100.0	3 547
Other side didn't pursue further	81.4	18.6	100.0	886
Respondent didn't pursue further	31.6	68.4	100.0	3 424
Other	62.5	37.5	100.0	518
All finalised problems	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 679

a See Table 7.3 for further details on manners of finalisation. Apart from the exceptions noted below, manners of finalisation are identical to those in Table 7.3.

b Combines the following categories from Table 7.3: 'dispute resolution' and 'complaint-handling body'.

c Combines the following categories from Table 7.3: 'lawyer's help' and 'someone else's help'.

Note: N=11 679 finalised problems. Data were missing for 648 problems. $\chi^2=2839.26$, $F_{7,72149}=252.36$, $p=0.000$.

Predicting favourability of outcome of legal problems

This section describes the problem and demographic characteristics associated with achieving favourable outcomes for legal problems. A binary multilevel logistic regression model was fitted to the Australian data to examine the independent predictors of achieving favourable outcomes. The regression compared finalised legal problems that had favourable outcomes to finalised legal problems that had unfavourable outcomes on the following variables: gender, age, Indigenous status, disability status, education, employment status, family status, housing type, main income, main language, remoteness of residential area, legal problem group and strategy used in response to legal problems.³

Thus, the regression reveals the types of problems, strategies and demographic groups with lower levels of favourable outcomes. Although regression analysis can be used to show where relationships exist, it cannot explain any relationships. Nonetheless, the regression on favourability of outcome helps to signal the types of problems and demographic groups that may benefit most from initiatives that aim to improve outcomes, and it also helps to identify the strategies to be encouraged. For example, problems with worse outcomes may be more serious, complex or intractable. As a result, improved pathways for resolving these types of problems may be warranted. In addition, the demographic groups that achieve worse outcomes may have a reduced capacity for resolving problems and may require additional encouragement, support or assistance to resolve their problems more favourably.

Table 8.5 provides a summary of the regression results on favourability of outcome for Australia. Legal problem group was the strongest significant predictor of achieving favourable outcomes for

³ See Chapter 2, 'Method: Multivariate analyses' section, and Appendix Tables A2.8 and A2.9 (model 8a) for further details.

Table 8.5: Regression summary – favourability of outcome of legal problems, Australia

SIGNIFICANT VARIABLES		
Variable	Categories compared	Odds ratio^a
Problem group	Accidents mean	1.9
	Consumer mean	1.2
	Credit/debt mean	0.7
	Crime mean	0.6
	Employment mean	0.7
	Family mean	1.3
	Government mean	0.7
	Health mean	0.7
	Housing mean	1.5
	Money mean	-
	Personal injury mean	1.7
	Rights mean	0.8
	Strategy	Sought advice took no action
Handled without advice took no action		1.7
Age	15–17 65+	1.3
	18–24 65+	-
	25–34 65+	-
	35–44 65+	-
	45–54 65+	-
	55–64 65+	-
Employment status	Unemployed other	0.8
Remoteness	Remote major city	-
	Regional major city	1.1
NON-SIGNIFICANT VARIABLES <i>gender, Indigenous status, disability status, education, family status, housing type, main income, main language</i>		

a An odds ratio (OR)>1.0 indicates that the first category had significantly higher odds of a favourable outcome than the second category. OR<1.0 indicates that the first category had significantly lower odds. The size of the OR indicates the strength of the relationship. E.g. OR=2.0 means that the odds for the first category were twice those for the second category. OR=0.5 means that the odds for the first category were half those for the second category, or, in other words, that the odds for the second category were twice those (i.e. 1/0.5=2.0) for the first category. See Appendix A2, 'Data analysis: Significance and strength of predictors' section for further details. '-' indicates that the comparison was not significant.

Note: N=11 800 finalised problems. Data were missing for 527 problems.

legal problems, with the next strongest predictor being the strategy used in response to legal problems. However, only a few demographic variables — namely, age, employment status and remoteness of residential area — were significant predictors of the favourability of the outcomes achieved. Although significant, these demographic predictors were relatively weak. Gender, Indigenous status, disability status, education, family status, housing type, main income and main language were not significant predictors. The regression results are further described in the sections below, with reference to the relevant unprocessed (or descriptive) statistics.⁴

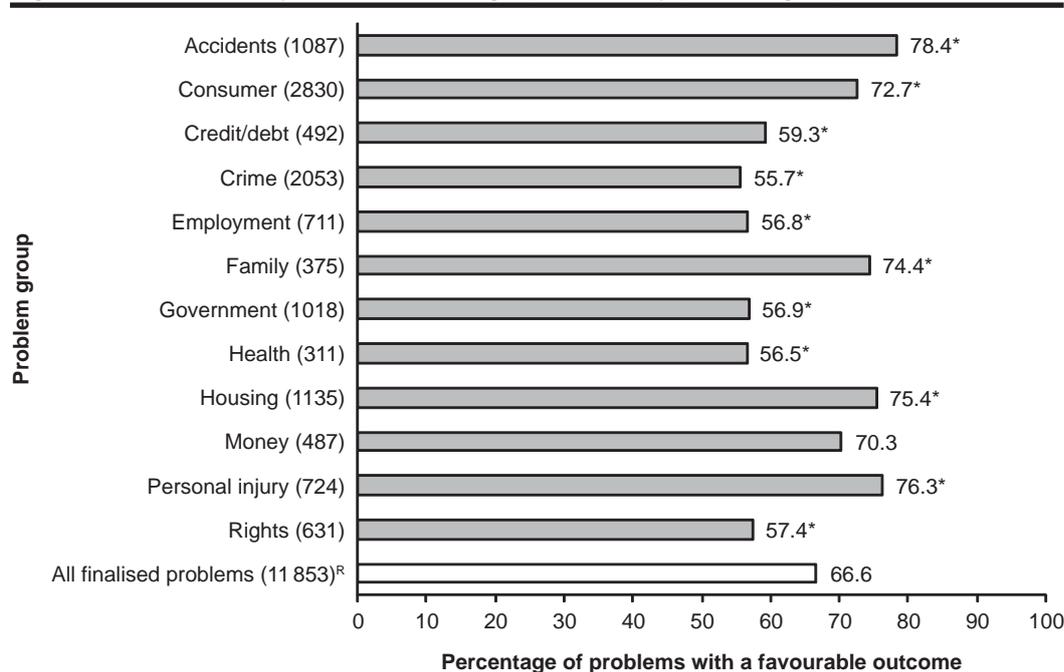
⁴ See Appendix Table A8.1 for the full results of this regression.

Problem group

The regression results indicated that problem group was the strongest significant predictor of whether or not respondents achieved favourable outcomes for their legal problems (see Table 8.5). Significantly higher odds of favourable outcomes than average were found for the accidents (1.9), consumer (1.2), family (1.3), housing (1.5) and personal injury (1.7) problem groups. The percentage of favourable outcomes for these problem groups ranged between 72.7 and 78.4 per cent, while the corresponding percentage for all problems on average was 66.6 per cent (see Figure 8.4).

Significantly lower odds of favourable outcomes than average were found for credit/debt (0.7), crime (0.6), employment (0.7), government (0.7), health (0.7) and rights (0.8) problems (see Table 8.5). The percentage of favourable outcomes for these problem groups ranged from 55.7 to 59.3 per cent (see Figure 8.4).

Figure 8.4: Favourability of outcome of legal problems by problem group, Australia



^R Reference category for problem group in the regression was mean of all problems.

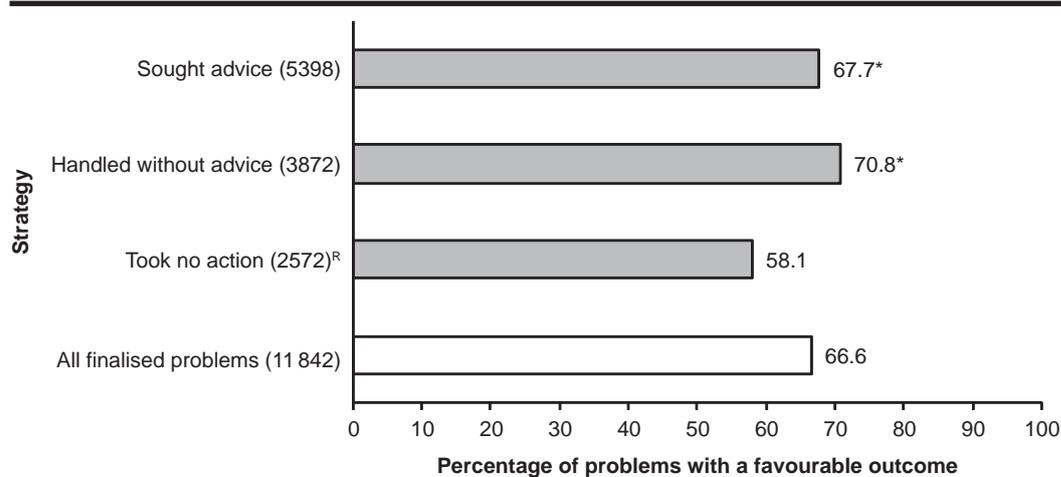
* Significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between this problem group and the mean of all problems in the regression.

Note: N=11 853 finalised problems. Data were missing for 475 problems.

Strategy

Compared to taking no action, both seeking advice (1.5) and handling the problem without advice (1.7) resulted in higher odds of a favourable outcome (see Table 8.5). Favourable outcomes were achieved for 67.7 per cent of the problems involving advice and for 70.8 per cent of the problems handled without advice, but for only 58.1 per cent of the problems resulting in taking no action (see Figure 8.5).

Figure 8.5: Favourability of outcome of legal problems by strategy in response to legal problems, Australia



^R Reference category for strategy in the regression.

* Significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between this strategy and took no action in the regression.

Note: N=11 842 finalised problems. Data were missing for 485 problems.

Demographic variables

The regression revealed that only a few demographic variables were significantly related to the favourability of outcomes. As already noted, these demographic variables were weaker predictors than both problem group and strategy. Age, employment status and remoteness of residential area were the only significant demographic predictors, and these predictors had similar strengths of association to the favourability of outcomes (see Table 8.5). Compared to their counterparts, the following demographic groups had significantly lower odds of achieving favourable outcomes:

- people aged 65 years or over (versus 15–17 year olds)
- people who had been unemployed
- people living in major city areas (versus those living in regional areas).

Table 8.6 presents the descriptive statistics for the demographic variables examined in the regression. Although both the youngest and the oldest age groups reported that 68.9 per cent of their problems resulted in favourable outcomes (see Table 8.6), the youngest group had significantly higher odds of favourable outcomes (1.3; see Table 8.5). Thus, the higher level of favourable outcomes for the youngest group becomes evident once the influences of other demographic and problem characteristics are also appropriately taken into account.

Respondents who had been unemployed had significantly lower odds of favourable outcomes (0.8) than other respondents (see Table 8.5). Respondents who had been unemployed reported favourable outcomes for 62.0 per cent of problems compared to 67.4 per cent for other respondents (see Table 8.6).

Respondents living in regional areas had higher odds of favourable outcomes (1.1) than respondents living in major city areas (see Table 8.5). Whereas favourable outcomes were reported for 68.5 per cent of the problems experienced by residents of regional areas, the corresponding percentage for residents of major city areas was 65.8 (see Table 8.6).

Table 8.6: Favourability of outcome of legal problems by each demographic variable, Australia

<i>Demographic variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Favourability of outcome</i>		<i>All finalised problems</i>	
		<i>Favourable</i>	<i>Unfavourable</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
		<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
Gender	Female	67.8	32.2	100.0	5 574
	Male ^R	65.5	34.5	100.0	6 278
	Total	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 853
Age	15–17	68.9	31.1	100.0	639*
	18–24	64.7	35.3	100.0	1 987
	25–34	66.5	33.5	100.0	2 462
	35–44	66.5	33.5	100.0	2 499
	45–54	68.1	31.9	100.0	1 985
	55–64	65.0	35.0	100.0	1 372
	65+ ^R	68.9	31.1	100.0	910
	Total	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 853
Indigenous status	Indigenous	67.4	32.6	100.0	230
	Other ^R	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 623
	Total	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 853
Disability status	Disability	65.0	35.0	100.0	2 802
	No disability ^R	67.1	32.9	100.0	9 051
	Total	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 853
Education	<Year 12	65.7	34.3	100.0	3 023
	Year 12	65.9	34.1	100.0	2 463
	Post-school ^R	67.4	32.6	100.0	6 325
	Total	66.7	33.3	100.0	11 811
Employment status	Unemployed	62.0	38.0	100.0	1 820*
	Other ^R	67.4	32.6	100.0	10 033
	Total	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 853
Family status	Single parent	68.7	31.3	100.0	1 109
	Other ^R	66.4	33.6	100.0	10 743
	Total	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 853
Housing type	Disadvantaged	63.5	36.5	100.0	874
	Other ^R	66.9	33.1	100.0	10 979
	Total	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 853
Main income	Government payment	66.7	33.3	100.0	2 681
	Other ^R	66.6	33.4	100.0	9 172
	Total	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 853
Main language	Non-English	67.4	32.6	100.0	634
	English ^R	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 219
	Total	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 853
Remoteness	Remote	66.6	33.4	100.0	310
	Regional	68.5	31.5	100.0	3 380*
	Major city ^R	65.8	34.2	100.0	8 163
	Total	66.6	33.4	100.0	11 853

^R Reference category for this demographic variable in the regression.

* Significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between this category and the reference category for this demographic variable in the regression.

Note: N=11 811 finalised problems for education and N=11 853 finalised problems for other demographic variables. Data were missing where totals are less than 12 327.

Outcome of legal problems: Australian summary

Australian respondents achieved favourable outcomes for the majority of their finalised legal problems (66.6%). Not surprisingly, there was an extremely strong significant relationship between the favourability of the outcomes achieved and how satisfied respondents were with these outcomes.

A series of analyses examined the problem characteristics, strategies and demographic groups that were associated with achieving favourable outcomes for legal problems. Regression analysis revealed that, of the variables examined, problem group was the strongest predictor of whether the outcomes of legal problems were favourable. Strategy was the second strongest predictor in the regression. However, most demographic characteristics were unrelated to whether favourable outcomes were achieved. The only significant demographic predictors were age, employment status and remoteness of residential area, and their effects were relatively weak. Legal problems had lower odds of favourable outcomes if:

- they were credit/debt, crime, employment, government, health or rights problems
- the respondent took no action in response to the problem, neither seeking advice nor handling the problem without advice
- the respondent was aged 65 years or over (versus 15–17 year olds)
- the respondent had been unemployed
- the respondent lived in a major city area (versus a regional area).

Other types of statistical analyses revealed that achieving a favourable outcome for a legal problem was also significantly associated with the severity of the problem, the number of adverse consequences resulting from the problem, the manner in which the problem was finalised and the total number of legal problems experienced by the respondent. In particular, lower levels of favourable outcomes were achieved:

- for substantial problems (62.2%) than for minor problems (69.4%)
- as the number of adverse consequences caused by problems increased
- for problems that were finalised by the respondent deciding not to pursue the matter further (31.6%) than for all problems on average (66.6%)
- as the number of legal problems experienced by the respondent increased.

The LAW Survey results for Australia on the outcomes of legal problems are interpreted further in Chapters 9 and 10. These chapters compare the Australian results to the LAW Survey results for other jurisdictions and to international findings.