

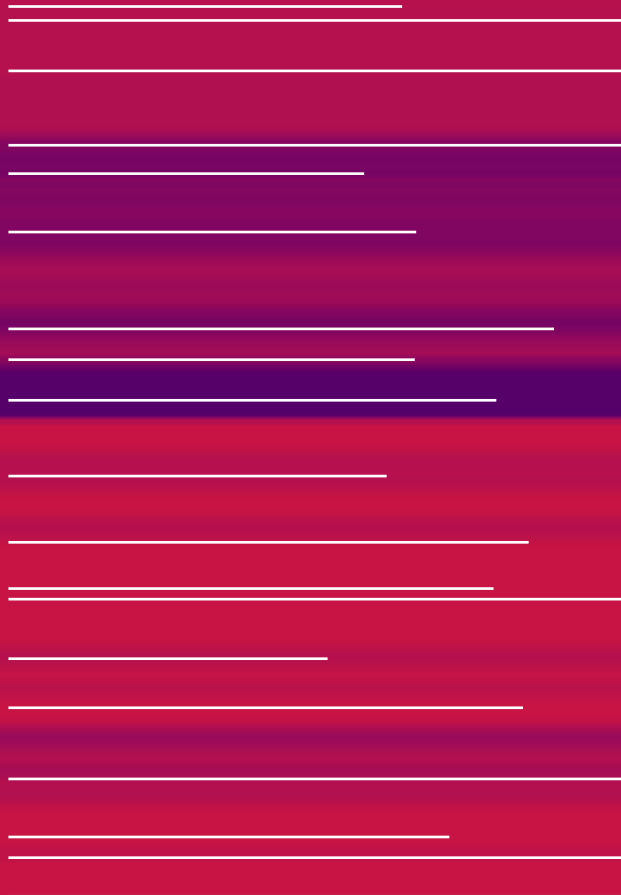


Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee

Inquiry into Crime Trends

FOURTH REPORT

June 2002





PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA
DRUGS AND CRIME PREVENTION COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO CRIME TRENDS
Fourth Report

ORDERED TO BE PRINTED

May 2002

by Authority
Government Printer for the State of Victoria

No. 158 Session 1999–2002

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee
Inquiry into Crime Trends: Fourth Report
DCPC, Parliament of Victoria

ISBN: 0-7311-0952-X

The Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee:

Level 8
35 Spring Street,
Melbourne Victoria 3000

Telephone: (03) 9651 3541
Facsimile: (03) 9651 3603
Email: sandy.cook@parliament.vic.gov.au
<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/dcpc>

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee

Members

The Hon. Cameron Boardman, M.L.C – **Chairman**

Mr. Bruce Mildenhall, M.L.A. – **Deputy Chairman**

The Hon. Robin Cooper, M.L.A.

Mr. Kenneth Jasper, M.L.A.

Mr. Hurtle Lupton, M.L.A.

The Hon. Sang Minh Nguyen, M.L.C.

Mr. Richard Wynne, M.L.A.

Committee Staff

Ms Sandy Cook
Executive Officer

Mr Peter Johnston
Legal Research Officer – Inquiry into the Inhalation of Volatile Substances

Dr James Rowe
Researcher – Inquiry into Motor Vehicle Theft

Ms Michelle Heane
Office Manager

Consultant

Mr Stuart Ross
Consultant – Inquiry into Crime Trends: Fourth Report

Functions of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee

The Victorian Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee is constituted under the *Parliamentary Committees Act 1968*, as amended.

Section 4 EF.

To inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with the illicit use of drugs (including the manufacture, supply or distribution of drugs for such use) or the level or causes of crime or violent behaviour, if the Committee is required or permitted so to do by or under this Act.

Terms of Reference

Received from the Legislative Council

1 March 2000

That pursuant to the *Parliamentary Committees Act 1968*, the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee be required to inquire into, consider and report on the following:

‘The incidence of crime in Victoria and to report every six months to the Parliament on levels of crime, areas of emerging concern and (where suitable) options for crime reduction or control’.

Chairman's Foreword

For the last two and a half years the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee has been researching the issue of crime trends in Victoria, as part of its ongoing Inquiry into the Incidence of Crime. The Committee has an obligation, as part of this Inquiry, to report to the Parliament every six months.

This is the fourth of such reports, and it follows previous reports that focussed on benchmarking crime trend data and the reporting of crime within the Melbourne Central Business District. The structure of this report varies slightly. The Committee has attempted to answer the question that is often debated, although seldom accurately: Is crime in Victoria increasing? The Committee concluded that the best way to tackle this question was in three stages.

The initial stage of the Report discusses how crime statistics in Victoria are compiled, in what ways the reporting of crime has varied over time, and the means by which possible trends can be identified. The Report then provides an overview of the level and rates of each crime type between 1 July 1996 and 30 June 2001. The final stage comprises a detailed examination of each of the 27 crime types used by Victoria Police in order to identify what changes have occurred in the number of crimes recorded each year. As this investigation is the main feature of the Report it is essential that anyone interpreting the findings is totally aware of the explanatory notes accompanying each offence category. This is critical, as changes that have been made to legislation, definitions and reporting techniques have influenced the rates of some specific crime.

The Committee also examines the issue of seasonal variations in crime reporting, offers possible explanations for Victoria's patterns of crime, and considers what kind of crime statistics are needed in order to know more about the causes of crime and the most appropriate ways to respond to it.

It must be noted that at the time of publication the Committee was unable to refer to the Australian Institute of Criminology's report to Victoria Police relating to the evaluation of the Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP) – the program that the police use to manage crime statistics. The Committee has had reservations about the adequacy of the LEAP program for some time, and has welcomed this review. It is important that this review is completed as soon as practicable to allow Victoria Police to upgrade or implement any changes necessary for improving the way crime statistics are collected and managed in this state.

I also want to stress that further debate must occur relating to the development and implementation of crime prevention policy. Historically governments have placed a high priority on traditional 'law and order' policy, however an understanding of the complexity of this subject has often been sadly lacking.

Crime prevention in the 21st century requires strong and focused leadership capable of coordinating all the government and non government sectors.

Finally, my thanks to the Committee who, as usual, worked well together to achieve this Report, and to the Committee staff. In particular, I'd like to thank Dr Stuart Ross, consultant on this Report, for his commitment to the project. Until late 2000 Stuart was Director of the National Centre for Crime and Justice Statistics in the Australian Bureau of Statistics. He is currently Project Manager for the Melbourne Criminology Research and Evaluation Unit within the Department of Criminology at the University of Melbourne.

Cameron Boardman MP
Chairman

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PART A Introduction

1. Scope of the Inquiry – History and background

Crime is an issue of considerable concern to the community. One of the main sources of information that we have about crime is the statistics on crime collected by police. There are approximately 450,000 individual crimes recorded by the Victoria Police each year, not counting traffic, parking and other regulatory infringements. Statistics on these recorded crimes are published in an annual Victoria Police report *Crime Statistics*. They also form part of the annual Australian Bureau of Statistics publication *Recorded Crime Australia*.

While these publications provide considerable information about the number and characteristics of crimes, they do not provide much assistance in answering some of the key questions that people have about crime:

- Is the level of crime increasing?
- How do crime rates vary between different places and at different times?
- What causes crime?
- What can be done to reduce crime rates?

The Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee of the Parliament of Victoria has been required to inquire into, consider and report on:

The incidence of crime in Victoria and to report every six months to the Parliament on levels of crime, areas of emerging concern and (where suitable) options for crime reduction or control.

The Inquiry commenced on 1 March 2000, and in the course of the Inquiry the Committee has produced three reports on crime in Victoria. The first, tabled in October 2000 and titled *Benchmarking Crime Trend Data 1995/1996 to 1999/2000*, examined Victoria Police crime statistics over a five-year period in order to provide a robust point of comparison for the analysis of future official crime statistics. This report also identified a number of limitations that need to be taken into account in the interpretation of crime statistics.

In June 2001 the Committee tabled its Second Report for the Inquiry into Crime Trends. This report compared crime rates in Victoria with those in other

Australian States and Territories using Australian Bureau of Statistics data. It showed that, by and large, Victoria has low rates of crime. Overall, the level of crime in Victoria is about 20% lower than for the rest of Australia. For many offences, Victoria has the lowest crime rate of any Australian jurisdiction. The Committee's Second Report also identified some issues of concern. Between 1999 and 2000 Victoria experienced large increases in the number of some crimes, particularly robbery and motor vehicle theft.

The Committee's third report, tabled in November 2001 and titled *Reporting Crime in the Melbourne CBD*, focused on the extent of crime in the City of Melbourne and the way that government and the community has responded to it. This report found that the level of crime in the CBD has increased over the past five years, and that drug offences, robbery and theft are particularly prevalent. It also found a substantial disparity between the type of offences that are most prevalent in the city and those that gained the greatest level of media coverage.

2. Outline of this report

This report is the next in the Committee's series of reports on crime in Victoria. The primary goal of this report is to answer the first of the questions above: is the level of crime in Victoria increasing? This question is addressed in three stages. Firstly, Part B of this report describes how crime statistics in Victoria are compiled, and some of the key features of the scope, definitions and counting rules that bear on how we interpret crime statistics. This section of the report also reviews some of the ways that crime varies over time, and how it is possible to identify trends in crime.

Part C provides a brief overview of the level and rates of each type of crime and the main findings of the analysis of crime trends during the period between July 1996 and June 2001.

Part D examines in detail each of the 27 crime types used by the Victoria Police in their crime statistics. The report describes how the number of crimes recorded each year has changed over the period between 1996/97 and 2000/01. Not all changes in crime rates are important. Some changes are the result of real upward or downward trends, while others reflect only "random" variations. This report applies a statistical test to determine whether changes in crime over the last five years represent significant trends. For each crime type, two tests are applied: a test for short-term trends for the last two years, and a test for long-term trends over the last five years.

In Part E, another form of variation in crime is considered – seasonal variation in crime rates. This part of the report examines the relative importance of seasonal variation compared with other factors that bring about change in crime rates. It analyses seasonality for three different offence types (assault, motor vehicle theft and drug consumer offences) and concludes that only in the case of assault do seasonal factors exert an important effect on crime rates.

A further goal of this report is to contribute to the debate about what we need to know about crime in order to better understand its causes and identify what actions need to be taken to control crime. Part F makes a number of suggestions about how crime statistics should be collected and presented.

This report appears at a time when the Victoria Police crime statistics and the Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP) database from which they are extracted are both under review by the Australian Institute of Criminology

(AIC). The AIC report was due to be delivered to the Police Commissioner by December 2001. At the time of preparation of this report, the AIC report was still not completed. The Committee looks forward to being able to comment on this report at a later date.

PART B Interpreting Trends in Crime Statistics

In 1998 there were 47 murders committed in Victoria. In 1999 the number of murders in Victoria rose by 32% to 62. In 2000 the number of murders fell to 55, a fall of 12%. What do these changes mean? Did the rise between 1998 and 1999 mean that there had been a real increase in the level of violence in our community, or that there had been substantial changes in the social, economic and criminological factors that give rise to fatal violence? Does a rise of 32% in the number of murders mean the same as a rise of 32% in the number of sexual assaults?

In order to understand what changes in the number of crimes recorded mean, it is necessary to examine two general issues about crime statistics:

- How are crime statistics collected, and what limitations are imposed by the manner in which they are collected?
- When does change in crime statistics constitute a real trend or difference rather than just random variation?

3. Scope, classificatory and counting rule issues in crime statistics

Categories of crime

Victoria Police crime statistics are derived from Crime Incident and Sub-Incident reports that are prepared by police members when crimes are reported or detected. These incident reports are part of the police Law Enforcement Assistance Package (LEAP) computer system, and crime statistics are prepared by extracting the appropriate records from LEAP and encoding them according to statistical counting rules and offence classifications. For operational purposes police code each crime report to one of over 4,000 different statutory and common law offence codes in the LEAP crime type classification. For statistical reporting purposes these codes are aggregated into 27 crime categories. Appendix 1 provides a description of each of these crime categories together with examples of statutory and common law offences found in each category.

Crime statistics do not give a complete picture of crime

Crime statistics do not provide a complete and accurate enumeration of criminal behaviour. Crime statistics represent only the “known” aspect of crime, as opposed to what criminologists refer to as “the dark figure of crime”, or the proportion of crime that remains unknown. The main reasons that crime statistics present an incomplete picture are:

- Criminal incidents are not always readily classified as such. A car accident resulting in death may or may not be the consequence of negligent driving. Family disputes may or may not meet a legal definition of assault. Missing property may be “lost” rather than “stolen”.
- Not all crime that occurs is reported to police by victims. Some property crimes, such as fraud, may not be noticed by the victim. In other cases, victims may choose not to report the crime to police. This is especially the case for offences against the person that are committed by someone who is known to the victim.
- Not all crime that is detected by police is recorded. Police have discretion about how to deal with crime, especially minor offences. Police may choose to deal with some crimes such as minor drug consumer offences and public order offences in ways that do not lead to an offence being recorded.

Crime statistics involve the application of standard definitions

There are over 4000 individual statutory and common law offences recorded on the Victoria Police Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP) database. These have been grouped into 27 broad offence categories. These categories have been further subdivided into four general classes: Crime Against the Person, Crime Against Property, Drug Crime and Other Crime. These statistical recording and reporting categories do not necessarily conform to legal offence definitions.

An important consequence of this aggregation of individual offences into general categories is that important variation in the individual crimes can be lost. For example, over 60% of crimes in the general class of Crime Against the Person are assaults, and a further 20% are sexual assaults. In comparison, less than half of one per cent of the offences in that class are homicides. Changes in the total amount of Crime Against the Person will mainly reflect changes in assault and sexual assault, and tell us almost nothing about homicides.

The definitions of crimes and crime categories may vary between different sources of statistics. Some important differences arise from the ways that crimes are defined in law in different States and Territories. For example, an incident that is classified as a rape in Victoria may be classified as an indecent assault in Queensland. There are periodical changes to offence categories and counting rules, legal definitions of offences and changes to regional boundaries, which affect the comparability of crime statistics (Mukherjee 1996, p. 77). Extreme

care must be taken to ensure that comparisons of crime statistics over time or between jurisdictions are made using like statistics.

Crime statistics involve the application of standard counting rules

The Victoria Police use different counting rules for different types of offences.

- For all crime against the person and most property crime, the counting unit is the number of principal victims for each separate occurrence of the offence. For example, if three offenders assault two victims – two offences are counted.
- For offences against statutes, the number of alleged offenders is the counting unit. For example, if three persons are found in possession of heroin – three offences of possess heroin are counted.
- For a small number of infrequent offences such as piracy, the incident is the counting unit (Victoria Police, 2001, p. 5).

Only the most serious offence in a criminal incident is recorded in official statistics, even though multiple charges may be laid for the one incident. For example, if an offender carrying a firearm commits an armed robbery and assaults a staff member, only the armed robbery is recorded, although the offender would be charged with armed robbery, assault and possession of a firearm. An offender who is in possession and admits using an illicit drug will have only the possession, the more serious offence, counted in official statistics, although he or she would be charged with both offences.

The consequence of these counting rules is that less serious offences against people and property tend to be “undercounted” in the crime statistics. We can be confident that the count of murders represents a full enumeration of all the murders brought to police attention. On the other hand, in a burglary incident where property is stolen, the thefts arising out of the incident are not counted.

Crimes statistics are the result of administrative processes (police filling in crime reports), and crimes are only included in the statistics when a crime report has been completed. The Victoria Police LEAP statistics count crimes in the month and year that they were brought to police attention, regardless of when the offence actually occurred. These annual counts are updated when the LEAP database is updated. It is often the case that crime figures published in previous years are adjusted either upwards or downwards to reflect late additions or refinements to the data in later years. Care must be taken in interpreting changes in recorded crime before yearly figures are finalised, which in some cases may be two or three years later.

Crime statistics are the product of reporting and recording practices

The likelihood that a crime will be reported to police can change over time. Reporting rates for many offences against the person are influenced by the level of support given to victims and their perceptions about whether police will be able to take effective action. Reporting rates for theft, burglary and other

property offences are clearly influenced by insurance company regulations requiring a police report of the offence, before a claim is paid (Walker 1994; Mukherjee 1996).

Many companies are reluctant to report fraud offences committed against them to police, preferring to either handle the investigation in-house, or to engage another private company with specialist skills to investigate. The AIC reports that the 1999 KPMG *Fraud Survey* found that 33.3% of organisations surveyed failed to report frauds committed against them to police, preferring to deal with the matter internally or dismiss the internal offender (Smith 1999, p. 3).

Other offences are mainly “detected”. That is, they are recorded when police take action to identify that a crime has been committed. For these crimes, operational decisions made by police have a direct effect on recorded crime statistics. Police periodically conduct blitz operations against certain offences such as drug possession, stolen goods offences, street begging and prostitution, which can drive the figures up for those particular offences. Indermaur also suggests that rises in the crime rate could be the result of a range of factors that he labels ‘police productivity’. These factors include increased police numbers, improvements in technology, record keeping and data base management (Indermaur 1996, p. 4).

Rises in the crime rate do not necessarily reflect an increase in actual crime

A change in the number of crimes recorded can result from a range of classificatory, counting rule, procedural, reporting and operational factors. Sometimes, many of these factors can be at work at the same time. In order to be confident that a rise or fall in the number of crimes committed represents a change in actual crime, we need to be able to answer the following questions:

- Have there been any legislative changes in the definition of the crime?
- Have the classificatory or counting rules in the statistics changed?
- Is there any evidence of changed reporting by victims?
- Have police undertaken any action that might lead to greater detection or recording of crimes?

In the case of murder, we know that there have been no significant changes in the legislation defining murder, that all detected murders will be enumerated, that all murders that are detected will be brought to police attention, and that police activity is likely to have little impact on the number of murders counted. In contrast, there have been a number of important changes in the legislation defining different forms of sexual assault (especially during the period between 1985 and 1993), that at least some sexual assaults will not be the most serious offence in a criminal incident, that victim reporting behaviour has changed over time, and that police policy in relation to victim support is probably important in determining reporting behaviour.

4. Identifying trends in crime statistics

Crime rates can vary in at least three ways:

1. Regular trend variation, where the number of crimes increases or decreases over time. An increase or decrease in crime can result from changes in the number of people committing crimes, the number of crimes that an offender commits in a given time (their "offending rate"), or the proportion of crimes that are reported to or recorded by police.
2. Cyclical or seasonal changes, where the number of crimes rises and falls at particular times of the month or year.
3. Irregular variation, where the number of crimes fluctuates around a mean value. Most irregular variation in crime rates is simply the consequence of the inherent "randomness" of crime. However, irregular variation may also result from the impact of rare events that have a short-term impact on crime rates. Police campaigns to suppress local drug markets, or a "crime spree" by a small number of highly active offenders are examples of sources of irregular variation.

In general, crimes that occur infrequently tend to show proportionately more irregular variability than crimes that are common. For example, the average monthly variation for homicide crimes is about six times as great as it is for residential burglary crimes.

If we want to know whether crime rates are rising or falling, it is necessary to try to separate out regular from irregular variation. One way to do this is to test whether there is a statistically significant correlation of monthly crime counts. In this report a Kendall's rank-order correlation test for trend has been applied to the monthly numbers of recorded crimes. For each crime type two tests have been carried out. A test for short-term trend has been done using the monthly crime numbers from July 1999 to June 2001. A test for long-term trend has been done using data for the full five years from July 1996 to June 2001. Where these tests for trend show a statistically significant increase, the size of this trend is indicated by the average annual percentage change between the first year and last year.

PART C Overview of Crime in Victoria

In the first half of the 20th century the crime rate in Victoria was remarkably stable, remaining at around 4,000 crimes recorded each year for every 100,000 people. In the post-war period this picture of stability changed dramatically. Total crime rates doubled in the ten years between 1945 and 1955, and then continued to rise throughout the 1960s and 1970s and 1980s. By 1975 the total crime rate was three times as high as it had been 30 years earlier (Walker 1994). This pattern was not confined to Victoria but was evident in all Australian jurisdictions to a greater or lesser extent. During this period, understanding crime trends was relatively straightforward – the levels of most forms of crime rose each year. In the last ten years a more complex pattern has been evident. While the level of total crime has continued to increase, the rate of increase has been much slower than in previous years. Different types of crime have shown different patterns of change. The level of some crimes has continued to increase, other forms of crime have been stable, while yet others have fallen. The following sections of this report give an overview of how the level of crime in Victoria has changed over the last five years.

5. The level of crime

The simplest measure of crime is the number of crimes recorded. Table 1 shows the number of crimes recorded in each of the 27 crime categories over the last five years. In considering the year to year movements in the number of crimes shown in this table readers should be aware of the caveats outlined in the previous chapter.

The first group of crimes are referred to as Crime Against the Person. They are all crimes that involve violence against the victim, and are regarded as the most serious group of criminal acts. Together, they account for about one in every 12 crimes reported to police. Nearly two-thirds of Crime Against the Person is non-sexual assault of some kind, and about one-quarter is sexual assault.

The group of offences that account for the majority of all recorded crimes is Crime Against Property. Over 80% of the crimes recorded by Police each year fall into this category. They are mainly offences that involve the theft of or

damage to property, and include various forms of burglary, theft and fraudulent offences. Some offences that are classified as Crime Against Property, in particular arson and aggravated burglary, can also involve some degree of danger to people.

The third group of offences is Drug Crime. Police distinguish two broad categories of these crimes. “Provider” offences involve the growing, manufacturing or selling of illicit drugs. “Consumer” offences involve the personal possession or use of illicit drugs. While Crimes Against the Person or Property are usually recorded by police after a victim has notified them that the crime has occurred, Drug Crimes are usually recorded after they have been detected by police in the course of routine or targeted investigative activity.

The fourth group of crimes in Table 1 is Other Crime. These include crimes associated with the way that people behave in public places (prostitution, drunkenness), crimes that arise from other justice processes (failing to appear at court, breaching parole), and being unlawfully in possession of weapons, explosives or housebreaking equipment. As with Drug Crime, this group of crimes are frequently recorded as the result of some kind of law enforcement activity.

It should be noted that the crime category labels used by Victoria Police are general descriptions of types of crime based on the principal features of offences. However, an offence may involve several elements that make simple categorisation difficult. For example, the offence of robbery involves elements of a crime against the person and property crime. Illegally obtaining prescription drugs involves elements of drug crime and fraud (a property crime). Some offences are placed in categories that do not necessarily reflect the features of the offence. For example, blackmail and extortion, a crime similar in many respects to robbery, is counted in the Other Crime category.

Table 1: Number of offences recorded – 1996/97 to 2000/01^a

	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
Crime Against the Person					
Homicide	156	134	186	164	208
Rape	1358	1179	1475	1167	1235
Sex (non-Rape)	7935	8473	7509	6537	6402
Robbery	2235	2812	3225	3409	4327
Assault	20165	20326	21459	19860	21935
Abduction/Kidnap	298	256	334	319	354
Sub-Total Against the Person	32147	33180	34188	31456	34461
Crime Against Property					
Arson	3968	3836	3301	3046	3351
Property Damage	43177	42164	43671	38359	40986
Burglary (Aggravated) ^b	275	624	1219	1733	2515
Burglary (Residential)	48063	45212	46670	47028	49376
Burglary (Other)	27192	26648	25928	28687	32134
Deception	33413	35255	37532	37531	29932
Handle Stolen Goods	7027	6961	7777	9540	9640
Theft From Motor Vehicle	49625	51832	56852	61495	63930
Theft (Shopsteal)	14760	14943	15700	16078	17306
Theft Of Motor Vehicle	32514	32871	32097	36894	42276
Theft Of Bicycle	10199	10204	9287	9521	8433
Theft (Other)	62790	65654	68686	68686	72914
Sub-Total Against Property	333003	336204	348720	358598	372793
Drug Crime					
Drug (Cult., Manuf., Traff.)	5033	6365	6644	5553	5179
Drug (Possess, Use)	9857	11307	11853	10550	9060
Sub-Total Drug Crime	14890	17672	18497	16103	14239
Other Crime					
Going Equipped To Steal	897	1082	1007	1039	927
Justice Procedures	8885	9773	11847	11649	11899
Regulated Public Order	2219	2311	2146	1996	1727
Weapons / Explosives	4302	4652	4899	4553	4996
Harassment	3467	3637	3504	2160	1949
Behaviour In Public	4955	5175	4564	3751	3799
Other	6742	7053	7439	7042	6658
Sub-Total Other Crime	31467	33683	35406	32190	31955
Total	411507	420739	436811	438347	453448

Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics

Note: a. Not all year to year changes represent statistically significant changes in the level of crime.

b. The number of aggravated burglary crimes recorded was influenced by a change in the legal definition of this offence. No meaningful long-term trend estimate can be calculated. See Part C for further details.

6. Rates of crime

When comparing rates of crime between different places or over long periods, it is important to make allowance for the size of the population that is affected by crime. States, regions or towns with large populations are likely to have more crime than those with small populations. As the population increases over time, the number of crimes will also tend to increase. Crime comparisons are made using the crime rate, usually calculated as the number of crimes for every 100,000 people in the population. Table 2 shows the rates of each of the crime types in the Victoria Police statistics.

The comparisons and trend analyses in this report are based on 2-year and 5-year time frames. In the five years between 1996/97 and 2000/01 the population of Victoria increased by about 170,000 people, from 4,560,000 to 4,730,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002). This represents an increase of approximately 3.5%, and one might therefore expect that the number of crimes recorded by police would also increase by 3.5%. However, virtually all of this population increase was in the age groups older than 40 years. Most crime is committed by people aged less than 40, and most victims are aged less than 40. Thus, the changes taking place in Victoria's population are *not* likely to lead to more crime. What this means is that, if we want to know whether the amount of crime in the community is increasing, it is probably better to look at trends in the number of crimes recorded and not in the rate of crime.

Table 2 : Recorded crime rates per 100,000 people – 1996/97 to 2000/01^a

	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
Crime Against the Person					
Homicide	3.4	2.9	4.0	3.5	4.4
Rape	29.8	25.6	31.7	24.9	26.1
Sex (non-Rape)	174.0	184.0	161.5	139.3	135.3
Robbery	49.0	61.1	69.4	72.7	91.4
Assault	442.2	441.4	461.7	423.3	463.6
Abduction/Kidnap	6.5	5.6	7.2	6.8	7.5
Sub-Total Against the Person	705.0	720.5	735.5	670.4	728.3
Crime Against Property					
Arson	87.0	83.3	71.0	64.9	70.8
Property Damage	946.8	915.6	939.5	817.5	866.2
Burglary (Aggravated) ^b	6.0	13.6	26.2	36.9	53.2
Burglary (Residential)	1054.0	981.8	1004.0	1002.3	1043.5
Burglary (Other)	596.3	578.7	557.8	611.4	679.1
Deception	732.7	765.6	807.5	799.9	632.6
Handle Stolen Goods	154.1	151.2	167.3	203.3	203.7
Theft From Motor Vehicle	1088.2	1125.5	1223.1	1310.6	1351.1
Theft (Shopsteal)	323.7	324.5	337.8	342.7	365.7
Theft Of Motor Vehicle	713.0	713.8	690.5	786.3	893.4
Theft Of Bicycle	223.7	221.6	199.8	202.9	178.2
Theft (Other)	1376.9	1425.7	1477.7	1463.8	1540.9
Sub-Total Against Property	7302.4	7300.6	7502.3	7642.4	7878.4
Drug Crime					
Drug (Cult., Manuf., Traff.)	110.4	138.2	142.9	118.3	109.5
Drug (Possess, Use)	216.2	245.5	255.0	224.8	191.5
Sub-Total Drug Crime	326.5	383.7	397.9	343.2	300.9
Other Crime					
Going Equipped To Steal	19.7	23.5	21.7	22.1	19.6
Justice Procedures	194.8	212.2	254.9	248.3	251.5
Regulated Public Order	48.7	50.2	46.2	42.5	36.5
Weapons / Explosives	94.3	101.0	105.4	97.0	105.6
Harassment	76.0	79.0	75.4	46.0	41.2
Behaviour In Public	108.7	112.4	98.2	79.9	80.3
Other	147.8	153.2	160.0	150.1	140.7
Sub-Total Other Crime	690.0	731.4	761.7	686.0	675.3
Total	9024.0	9136.3	9397.4	9342.0	9582.9

Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics

Note: a. Not all year to year changes represent statistically significant changes in the level of crime.

b. The number of aggravated burglary crimes recorded was influenced by a change in the legal definition of this offence. No meaningful long-term trend estimate can be calculated. See Part C for further details.

7. Crime trends: The highlights

Crime Against the Person

The level of Crime Against the Person has been stable for the last five years. The most notable exception to this pattern of stability has been robbery, where there has been a sustained increase averaging over 20% per year. This increase in robbery is both a short-term and long-term trend, and constitutes one of the most serious crime problems in Victoria at present. The other exception to the stability in Crime Against the Person is the slow decline in the number of non-rape sexual assaults, averaging about 6% per year over the past five years.

Table 3: Short-term and long-term trends for Crime Against the Person

Offence type	2 year (1999/2000 – 2000/01) trend	5 year (1996/97 – 2000/01) trend
Homicide	None	None
Rape	None	None
Sex (non-rape)	None	Decreasing (6% per year)
Abduction/kidnap	None	None
Robbery	Increasing (27% per year)	Increasing (24% per year)
Assault	None	None
Total Against Person	None	None

Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics

Crime Against Property

The general pattern for Crime Against Property is one of increase, especially in the short-term. Most crimes involving theft increased in the two years between July 1999 and June 2001, with especially large increases in aggravated burglary (45%), motor vehicle theft (15%) and burglary of non-residential properties (12% per year). Rates of motor vehicle theft have also shown a long-term increase over the five years from July 1996 to June 2001. The rise in aggravated burglary is partly attributable to a change in the legal definition of this type of crime. While it is likely that there has been a short-term increase in aggravated burglary, the size of the short-term trend estimate shown in Table 4 may overstate the real increase. This change in definition is explained in more detail in the next section.

Exceptions to this short-term increasing trend in property crime include bicycle theft, property damage and arson, both of which showed small short-term decreases, and residential burglaries where no trend is evident.

Table 4: Short-term and long-term trends for Crime Against Property

Offence type	2 year (1999/2000 – 2000/01) trend	5 year (1996/97 – 2000/01) trend
Arson	Decreasing (4% per year)	None
Property Damage	Decreasing (1% per year)	None
Burglary (Aggravated)	Increasing (45% per year)	No trend estimate ^a
Burglary (Residential)	None	None
Burglary (Other)	Increasing (12% per year)	None
Deception	None	Decreasing (3% per year)
Handle Stolen Goods	Increasing (1% per year)	None
Theft From Motor Vehicle	Increasing (4% per year)	None
Theft (Shopsteal)	Increasing (8% per year)	None
Theft Of Motor Vehicle	Increasing (15% per year)	Increasing (8% per year)
Theft Of Bicycle	Decreasing (11% per year)	None
Theft (Other)	Increasing (6% per year)	None
Total Against Property	Increasing (4% per year)	None

Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics

Note: a. The number of aggravated burglary crimes recorded was influenced by a change in the legal definition of this offence. No meaningful long-term trend estimate can be calculated. See Part C for further details.

Drug Crime

The number of drug possession and use crimes recorded by police declined in the two years to June 2001, while the number of more serious drug cultivation, manufacturing and trafficking offences remained stable. Both types of drug crime were stable over the five years from July 1996 to June 2001.

Table 5: Short-term and long-term trends for Drug Crime

Offence type	2 year (1999/2000 – 2000/01) trend	5 year (1996/97 – 2000/01) trend
Drug (cultivate, manuf., traffick)	None	None
Drug (possess, use)	Decreasing (14% per year)	None
Total Drug Crime	Decreasing (12% per year)	None

Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics

Other Crime

Trends in Other Crime showed a mix of increasing, decreasing and stable trends. There were long-term increases in justice procedure crimes and weapons and explosives crimes. The increase in weapons and explosives offences was also a significant short-term trend. Public order crimes, harassment and public behaviour offences all showed decreases.

Table 6: Short-term and long-term trends for Other Crime

Offence type	2 year (1999/2000 – 2000/01) trend	5 year (1996/97 – 2000/01) trend
Going equipped to steal	None	None
Justice procedures	None	Increasing (8% per year)
Regulated public order	None	Decreasing (6% per year)
Weapons/ explosives	Increasing (10% per year)	Increasing (4% per year)
Harrassment	None	Decreasing (6% per year)
Behaviour in public	None	Decreasing (6% per year)
Other offences	None	None
Total Other Crime	None	None

Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics

PART D Trends in Crime

We often think about crime as a general problem that shows general patterns of change. We talk about crime as being “on the increase” or “under control”. The reality is that different forms of crime can show very different patterns of change. At any given time, some types of crimes can be increasing, some decreasing and some staying the same. This section examines the trends evident in the 27 different crime types in the Victoria Police statistics. Where these crimes have shown significant increases or decreases over the last five years, the factors that may have given rise to these changes are examined.

8. Crime Against the Person

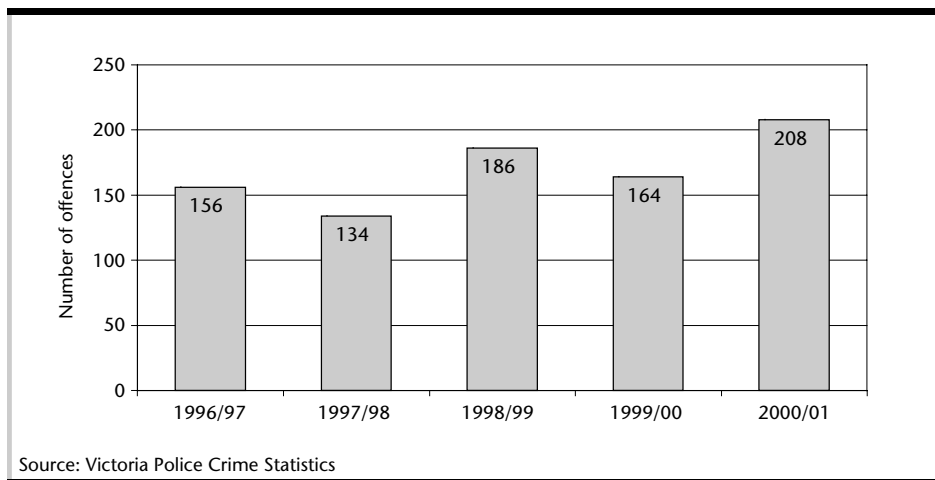
Crime Against the Person includes all violent crimes. These crimes may involve threatened as well as actual violence against another person. In some crimes, such as driving causing death, the violence may result from negligence rather than an intention to hurt someone. Robbery is regarded as an offence against the person because it involves actual or threatened violence as well as the taking of property from the victim.

Homicide

Homicide includes intentional murder as well as the crimes of manslaughter and driving causing death where the death of the victim is not intentional or involves some mitigating circumstance. Victoria Police record a total of between 140 and 200 homicide offences a year. Only about one-third of these crimes are murders, and the remainder are mainly attempted murder and driving causing death offences.

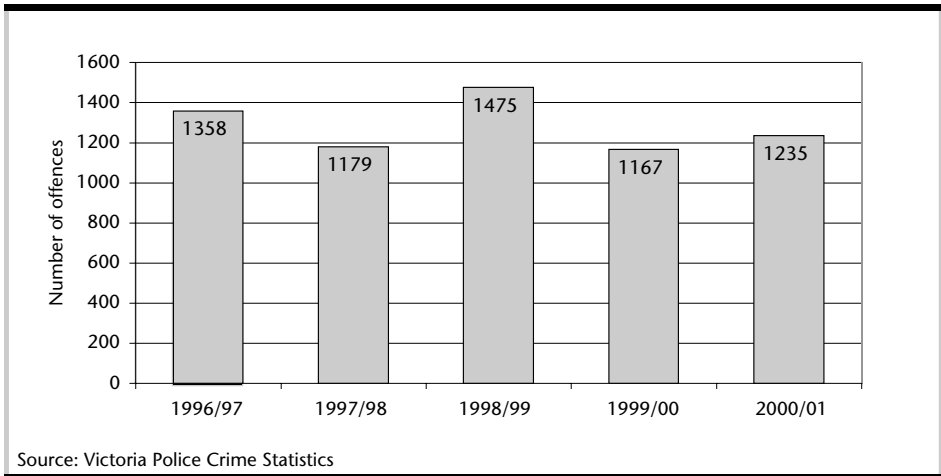
The annual number of homicide offences is highly variable. The average annual number of homicide offences over the last five years is 170, with year to year variations of plus or minus 25%. There is no evidence of any long-term or short-term trend in total homicide offences. Analyses carried out by the Australian Institute of Criminology have shown that the Victorian murder and manslaughter rates have been stable for the last ten years (Mousoz 2000).

Figure 1: Homicide Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



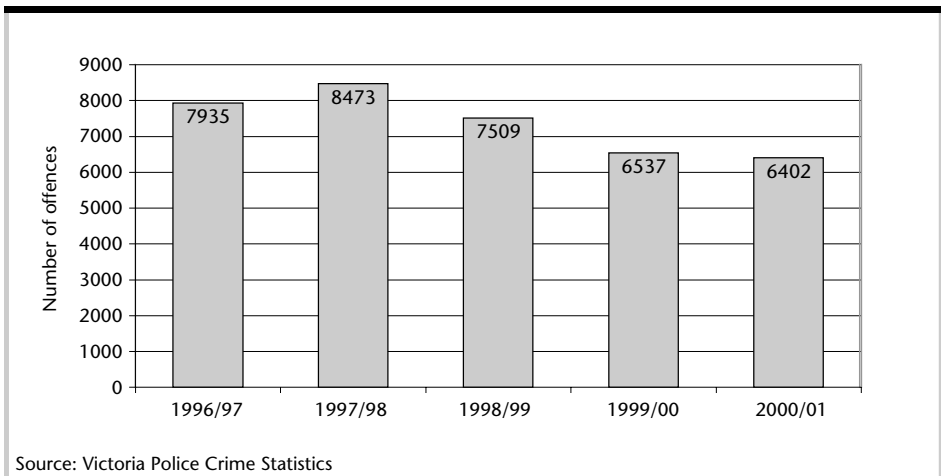
Rape

Rape offences are sexual assaults involving actual or attempted sexual penetration of the victim. Over the past five years the total number of rape offences reported to the police has varied from 1,358 in 1996/97 to 1,167 in 1999/2000. During the late 1980s and early 1990s the number of rape offences recorded by police increased significantly as a result of legislative changes that broadened the legal definition of rape as well as increased reporting of sexual assaults by victims (Ross & Brereton 1997). However, the number of rape offences has been relatively stable since 1996/97 and there is no evidence of either a long-term or short-term change in the number of rape crimes.

Figure 2: Rape Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01

Other sex offences

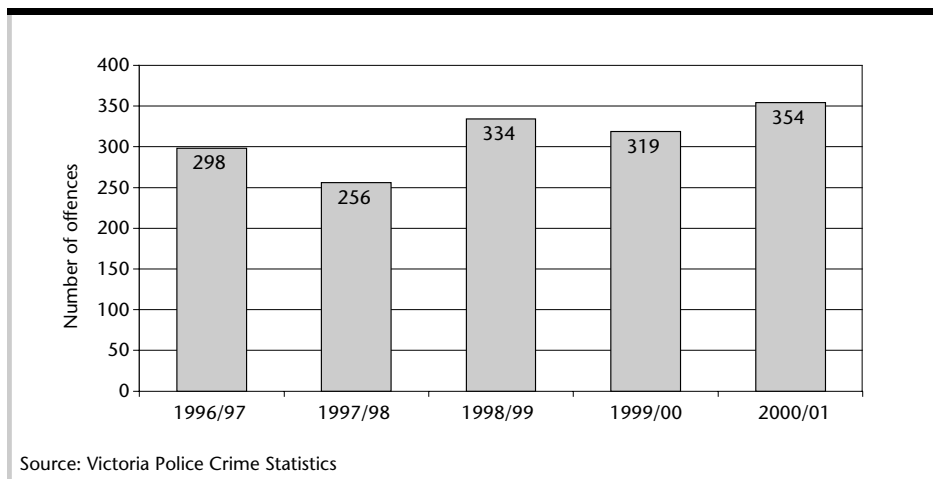
Non-rape sex offences include incest, indecent assaults and non-assaultive offences such as indecent exposure. There are around five to six times more non-rape sexual offences recorded by police than rape offences. The total number of other sexual offences recorded by police over the past five years has varied from 8,473 in 1997/98 to 6,402 in 2000/01. There have been successive declines in the annual total of other sex offences for the past four years, with a significant downward trend in the last five years.

Figure 3: Other Sex Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01

Abduction/kidnapping

Abduction and kidnapping offences involve taking away another person against their will or against the will of their parent or guardian. These crimes show many of the characteristics of sex offences. The victims are most commonly young, more likely to be female than male, and frequently the offender is known to the victim. The total number of kidnapping/abduction offences has varied from 256 in 1997/98 to 354 in 2000/01, but there is no evidence of either a long-term or short-term trend.

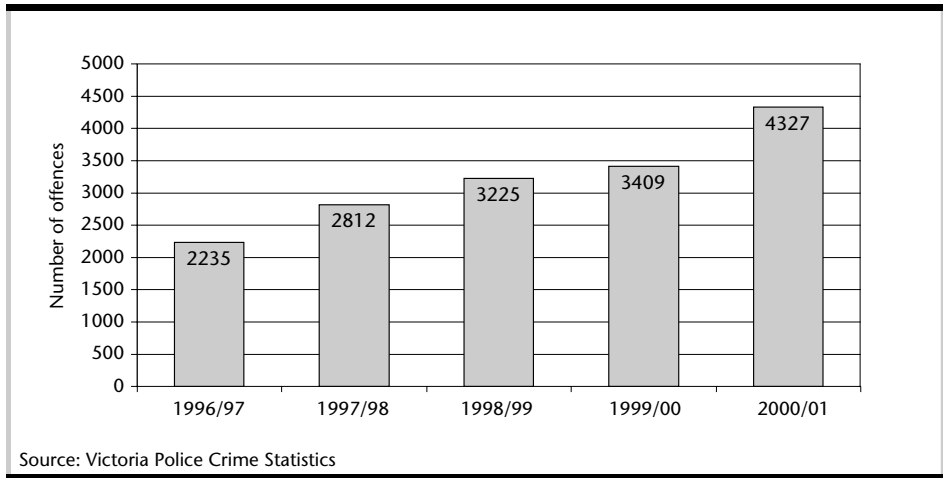
Figure 4: Kidnapping/Abduction Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



Robbery

Robbery involves taking property from a victim through the use or threatened use of force or violence. Around six in every ten robberies in Victoria involve the use of a weapon (“armed robberies”), but firearms are used in less than one in ten robberies (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001). Victims of robbery crimes can be individual persons or organisations (usually businesses). There has been a sustained increase in the number of robberies in Victoria and in many other Australian States over the last decade. The total number of robberies in Victoria has nearly doubled in the past five years, rising from 2,235 in 1996/97 to 4,327 in 2000/01. The short-term trend increase from July 1999 to June 2001 was 27% per year, and the long-term trend increase from July 1996 to June 2001 averaged 24% per year.

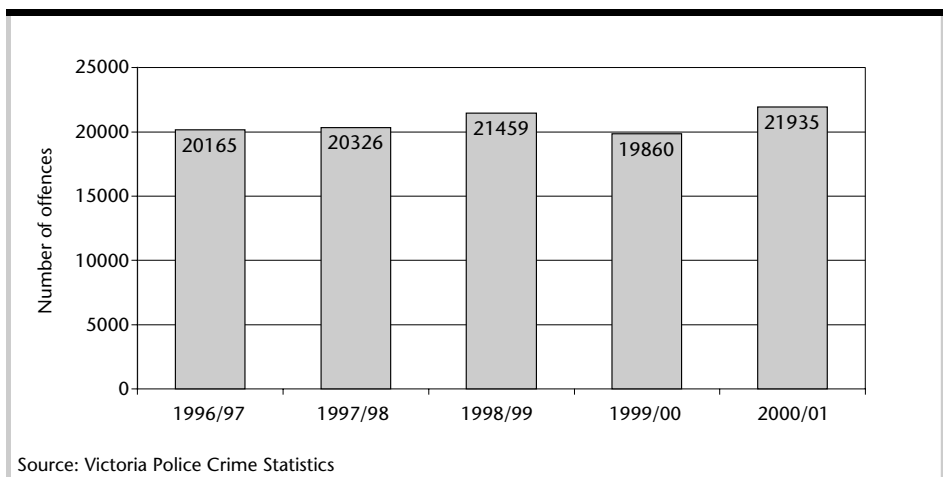
Research in New South Wales has shown that robberies tend to be highly concentrated in inner urban areas and are typically committed at night and on weekends (Jochelson, 1997). Australian Institute of Criminology research on drug use by police detainees shows that offenders who commit robbery are likely to be drug dependent (Makkai & McGregor 2001).

Figure 5: Robbery Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01

Assault

Assaults account for over 60% of all crimes against the person that are recorded by police. The legal definition of assault encompasses a very broad range of actions than involve violence or the threat of violence. There are important differences in assaults within the home and those that occur outside it. Assaults that occur at home are much more likely to involve female victims than males, while males are more likely to be involved in street assaults and assaults taking place in hotels and clubs. Home-based violence is much more likely to involve an offender who is a family member or someone else known to the victim (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999).

The number of assaults recorded in Victoria has been stable for the last five years. Year to year variations are relatively small, ranging from a high of 21,935 in 2000/01 to a low of 19,860 in 1999/2000.

Figure 6: Assault Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01

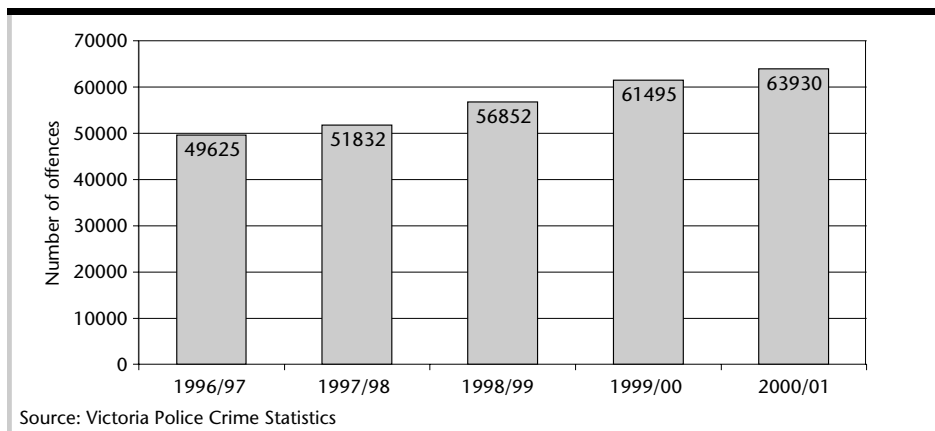
9. Crime Against Property

The total amount of property crime recorded by police has increased substantially in the past two years. In 1996/97 police recorded a total of 333,003 property crimes, and this total increased by 12% to 372,793 in 2000/01. Trend analysis shows that there was a statistically significant increase in total property crime over the last two years (1999/2000 to 2000/01). The increase in property crime is mainly due to increased theft crimes. All categories of theft except bicycle theft have increased over the past two years, and thefts of motor vehicles have also increased over the last five years. The increase in most forms of theft crime has not extended to other types of property crime. The number of residential burglaries has been stable for the past five years, although there has been a short-term increase in the number of burglaries of non-residential properties. The very large short-term and long-term increase in the number of aggravated burglaries is primarily due to a broadening of the definition of these crimes. Crimes involving theft by deception and damage to property showed short-term declines.

Theft from motor vehicles

Theft from a motor vehicle is the second largest category of property crime. This form of crime includes theft of personal property left in vehicles (for example, mobile phones, bags, compact discs) as well as theft of parts of the vehicle itself. The total number of recorded thefts from motor vehicles has increased each year since 1996/97, from 49,625 crimes in 1996/97 to 63,960 in 2000/01, although only the short-term trend is statistically significant.

Figure 7: Theft from Motor Vehicles Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01

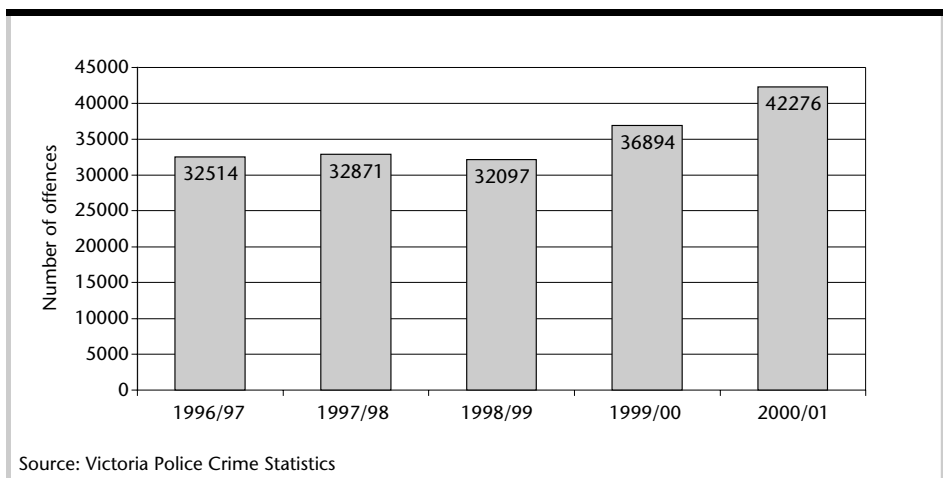


Theft of motor vehicles

One of the most significant trends in crime in Victoria over the past few years has been the increase in motor vehicle theft. The number of motor vehicles recorded stolen increased from 32,097 in 1998/99 to 42,276 in 2000/01, a rise of over 30% in two years. Analysis shows both a long-term (five year) and short-term (two year) increase in thefts, although the long-term trend is mainly attributable to the very large increase in monthly counts that took place after the middle of 1999. The rise in Victorian motor vehicle thefts parallels rises in several other Australian States and Territories, most notably Tasmania, Queensland and the Northern Territory. However, the increase in Victoria over the past two years is proportionately the largest of any Australian jurisdiction. Moreover, the recent increases mean that Victoria's rate of motor vehicle theft is now higher than the national average rate for Australia. This is particularly noteworthy given that Victoria has generally low rates of property crime compared with other Australian jurisdictions (Australia Bureau of Statistics 2001).

The rise in Victorian rates of motor vehicle theft is the subject of another Inquiry by the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. The report of this Inquiry is due to be tabled in Parliament in September 2002.¹

Figure 8: Motor Vehicle Theft Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



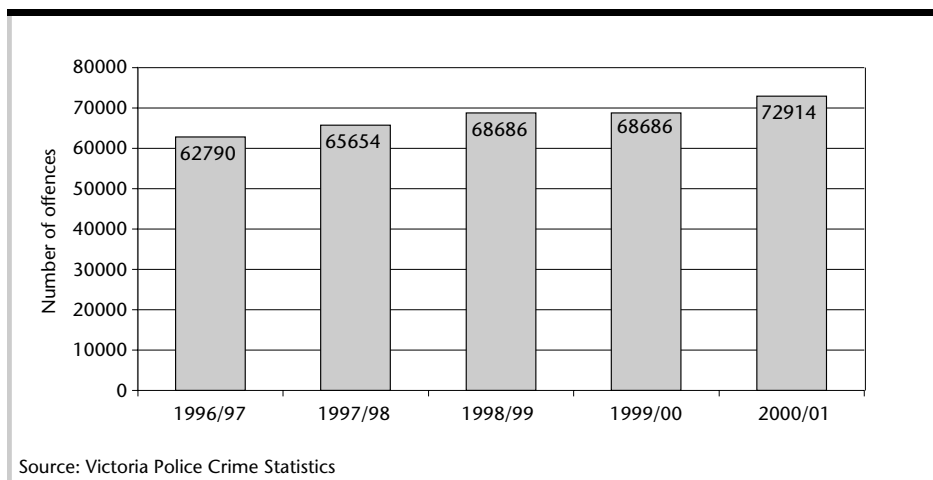
¹ The terms of reference for the Inquiry into Motor Vehicle Theft are set out in Appendix 2.

Other forms of theft

There are four other crime types that involve theft: shopstealing, bicycle theft, other theft and handling stolen goods. Of these, three (shopstealing, other theft and handling stolen goods) have shown statistically significant increases over the past two years, while the fourth (bicycle theft) showed a significant decrease.

Other theft includes all thefts not counted in any other category and is the largest single crime category used by the police, accounting for about one in every five property crimes. The number of other theft crimes recorded has increased steadily over the past five years, with a statistically significant rise over the two years 1999/2000 and 2000/01.

Figure 9: Other Theft Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01

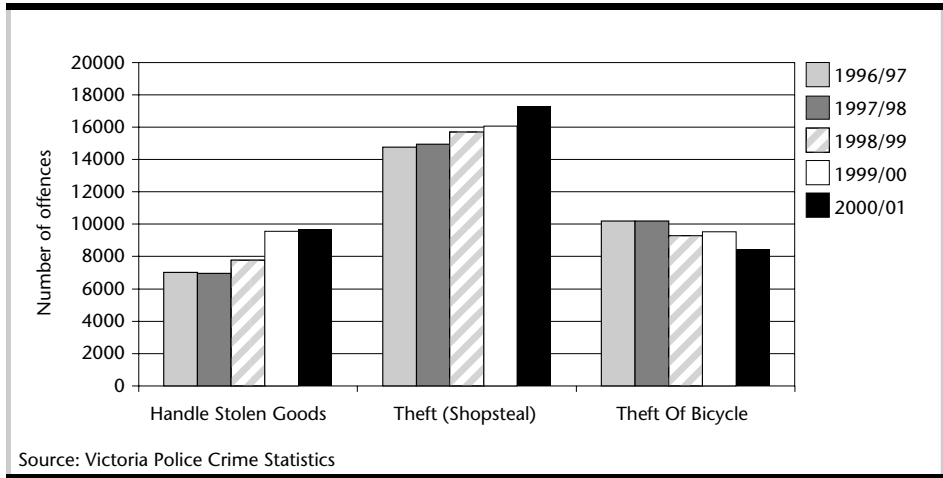


Shopstealing includes all thefts of retail goods during business hours. The number of shopstealing crimes recorded by police was stable during 1996/97 and 1997/98, but has increased substantially, particularly in the last two years. The total number of shopstealing crimes recorded rose from 14,760 in 1996/97 to 17,306 in 2000/01. Handle stolen goods crimes are derived from theft or burglary crimes, and are sometimes recorded when police detect someone in possession of stolen goods but cannot prove that the person was directly responsible for stealing them. There was a large increase in the number of these crimes recorded between 1998/99 and 1999/2000, from 7,777 to 9,540. Handle stolen goods crimes are frequently detected by police as the result of targeted investigative activity, so this rise may represent a change in policing as well as the general rise in theft-related crime.

In contrast to the rises apparent in all other forms of theft, the number of bicycles reported stolen has declined over the past five years, with a statistically significant fall in the last two years. In 1996/97 a total of 10,199 bicycle theft crimes were reported to police, but by 2000/01 the annual total had fallen by

17% to 8,433. It is unclear why the trend in this form of theft is in the opposite direction to those of all other forms of theft crime.

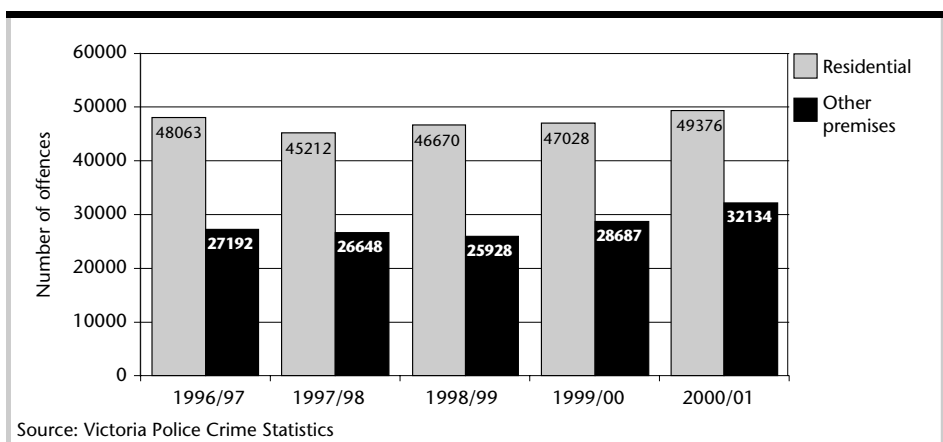
Figure 10: Shopstealing, Bicycle Theft and Handle Stolen Goods Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



Burglary crimes

Burglary crimes occur when an offender enters a building with the intention of committing another crime. The offender's intent may be to steal or damage property, commit an assault or sexual assault, or carry out any other illegal act. Burglary crimes are classified according to whether the place being burgled is a residential premises or not. Residential burglaries account for about 60% of all these crimes. The number of residential burglaries has been stable since 1996/97 while the number of non-residential burglaries has increased in the last two years, from 25,928 in 1998/99 to 32,134 in 2000/01.

Figure 11: Residential and Non-residential Burglary Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01

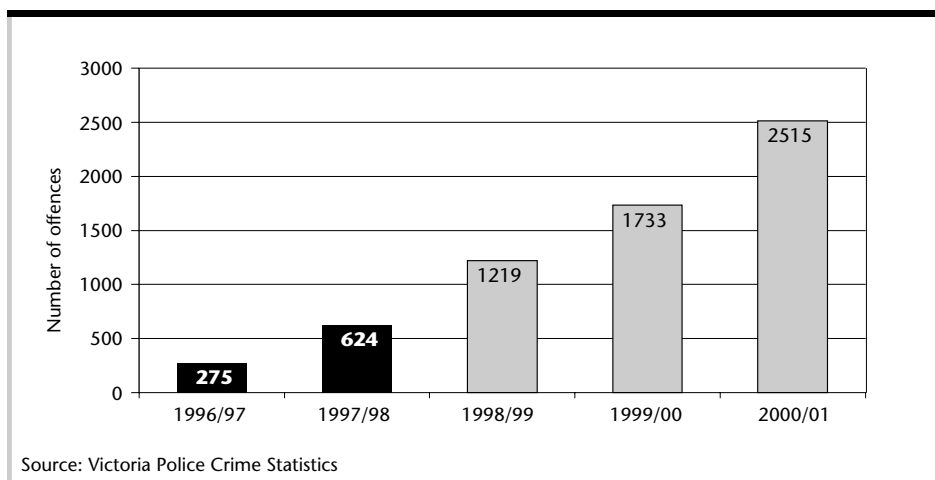


Aggravated burglary is the most serious form of burglary. The legislation defining aggravated burglary was changed in 1997 with the result that more burglaries were classified as “aggravated”. Previously, an aggravated burglary was only recorded when an offender entered the property while armed with a weapon or explosives. In most cases this was only known if the offender came into contact with someone present in the property. The 1997 reform extended the definition of aggravated burglary to include situations where:

... at the time of entering the building or the part of the building a person was then present in the building or part of the building and he or she knew that a person was then so present and was reckless as to whether or not a person was so present (*Crimes Act 1958 s.77 1 (b)*).

This change was probably the major factor behind the very large increases in aggravated burglary in the period 1996/97 to 1998/99. The number of aggravated burglaries has continued to increase over the last two years, when it must be assumed that the impact of the change in legislative definition is unlikely to be the major factor. Many aggravated burglaries are, in effect, robberies that take place in the victim’s home. Thus, the rise in aggravated burglaries may stem from the same underlying causes as the rise in robberies.

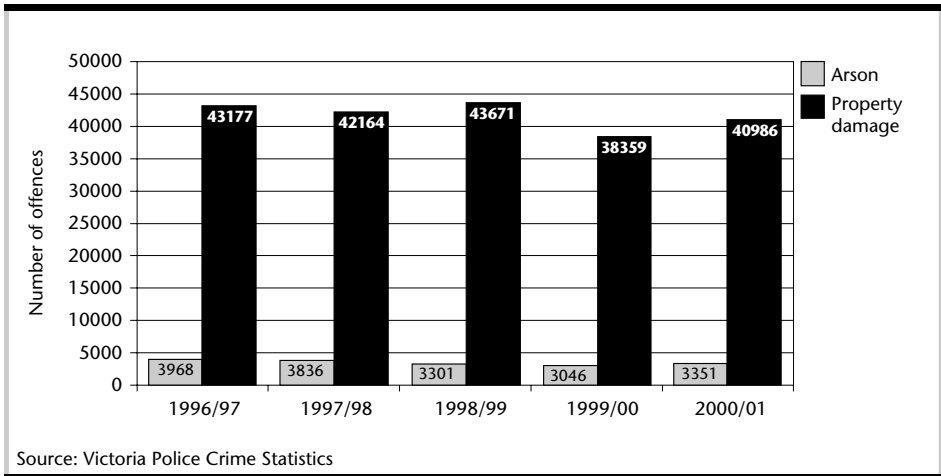
Figure 12: Aggravated Burglary Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



Note: The bars have been shaded differently in order to show these data incorporate a change in the legislative definition of the Offence.

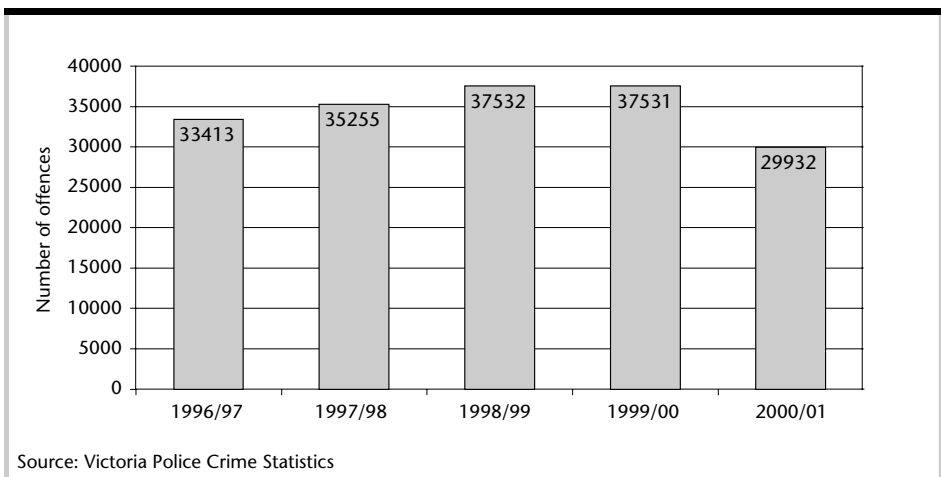
Property damage crimes

Property damage offences are grouped according to whether the damage was caused by fire (arson crimes) or by other means. Arson is generally regarded as the most serious form of property damage, and accounts for less than ten per cent of all these crimes. Other types of property damage crimes are wilful damage and criminal damage. The number of property damage and arson crimes recorded by police has been decreasing slowly over the past two years.

Figure 13: Property Damage and Arson Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01

Deception crimes

The category of deception offences includes a very wide range of deceptive and fraudulent criminal behaviour, including the illegal use of cheques and credit cards, obtaining benefits (for example, Social Security benefits) through the use of false identities or by making false statements, selling forged goods, and fraudulently obtaining prescription drugs. The number of these crimes is substantially influenced by whether the victims, often businesses, choose to report them to police. The number of deception offences has fallen by around three per cent a year over the last five years.

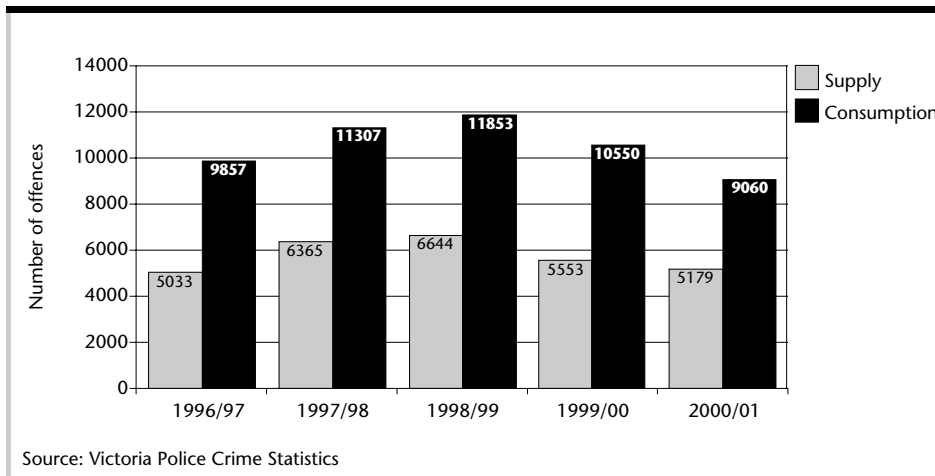
Figure 14: Deception Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01

10. Drug Crime

Crimes involving illicit drugs are grouped according to whether they are associated with the provision of drugs or the use of drugs. "Supply" crimes include importation, manufacturing, growing and trafficking (selling) drugs. "Consumer" crimes include the possession of non-commercial quantities of drugs and the use of illicit drugs. The number of both drug supply and drug consumer crimes has fallen over the past two years, although only the decline in drug consumer crimes is statistically significant.

The changes in the number of drug crimes must be interpreted with caution. Two factors may have influenced the number of drug crimes recorded by police. During 2001 heroin became generally less available in Victoria, the price of heroin rose and purity levels fell. This heroin "drought" may have led to a fall in the number of casual heroin users. The number of recorded drug crimes is also strongly influenced by the way that police resources are directed at illicit behaviour associated with drugs. Two recent police initiatives may have led to changes in the number of recorded drug crimes. These are the targeting of street drug "markets" and the extension of the police cautioning program to cover minor drug offences.

Figure 15: Drug Supply and Consumption Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01

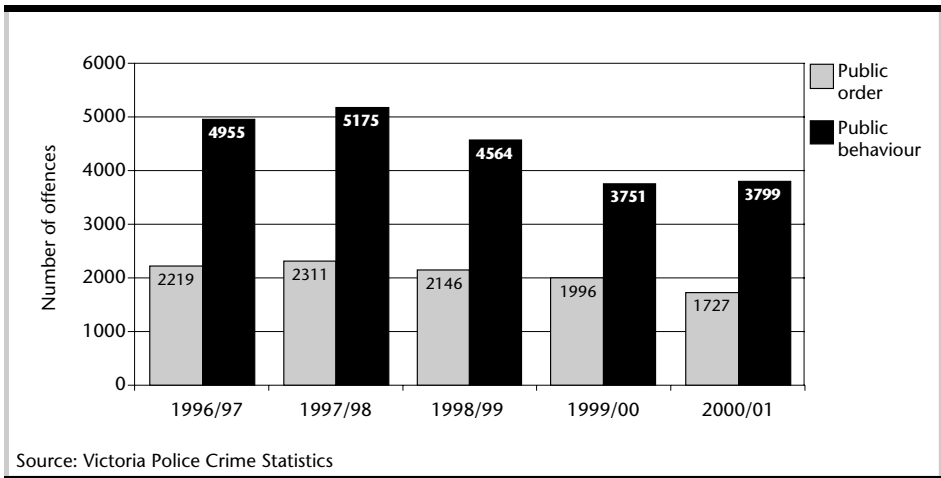


11. Other Crime

Public Order and Public Behaviour crimes

The category of Other Crime includes a mix of offence types that do not fall into any other crime category. Regulated public order crimes are mainly concerned with the regulation of licenced premises, betting and gaming and prostitution. Behaviour in public crimes include offensive behaviour and language as well as public drunkenness. There have been significant downward trends in the number of crimes recorded in both of these categories over the past five years. The number of public order crimes recorded in 2000/01 was over 20% less than that recorded five years earlier, and the number of behaviour in public crimes has also fallen by more than 20% over the same period. The Committee has undertaken an inquiry into Public Drunkenness. More information about this form of crime can be found in the Committee's Report entitled *Inquiry into Public Drunkenness – Final Report*.

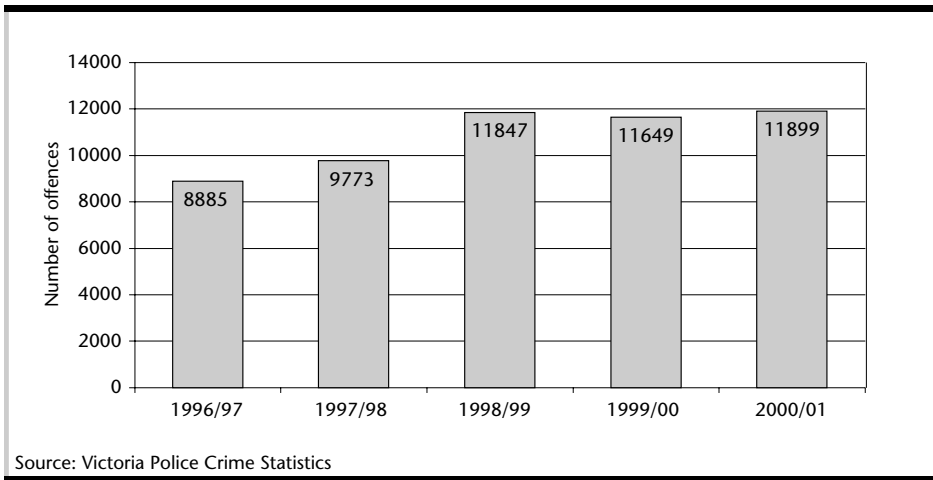
Figure 16: Public Order and Public Behaviour Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



Justice Procedure crimes

The category of Justice Procedure crimes covers a large number of offences associated with the administration of justice. These include failure to appear at court, resisting arrest, breaches of bonds and suspended sentences, and escaping from custody. There has been a significant increase in the number of recorded Justice Procedure crimes over the last five years, with virtually all of this increase occurring in the period 1996/97 to 1998/99. An important factor contributing to this growth has been the rise in the number of breaches of court Intervention Orders.

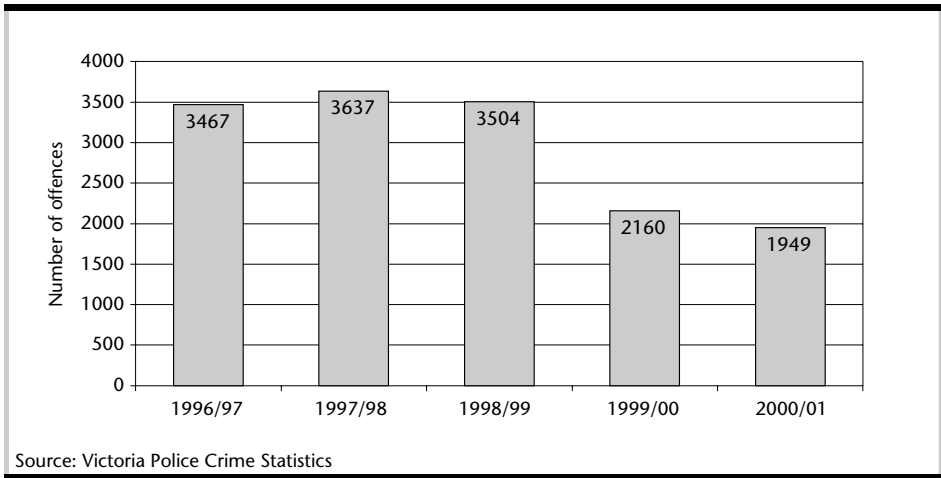
Figure 17: Justice Procedure Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



Harassment crimes

Harassment crimes include stalking as well as making offensive, threatening or harassing telephone calls. The number of harassment crimes recorded by police has declined significantly over the past five years, with the largest fall occurring between 1998/99 and 1999/2000. This fall represents a reversal of the equally sharp rise in harassment crimes between 1995/96 and 1996/97, and the rate of recorded harassment crimes in 2000/01 is essentially the same as that during the early 1990s.

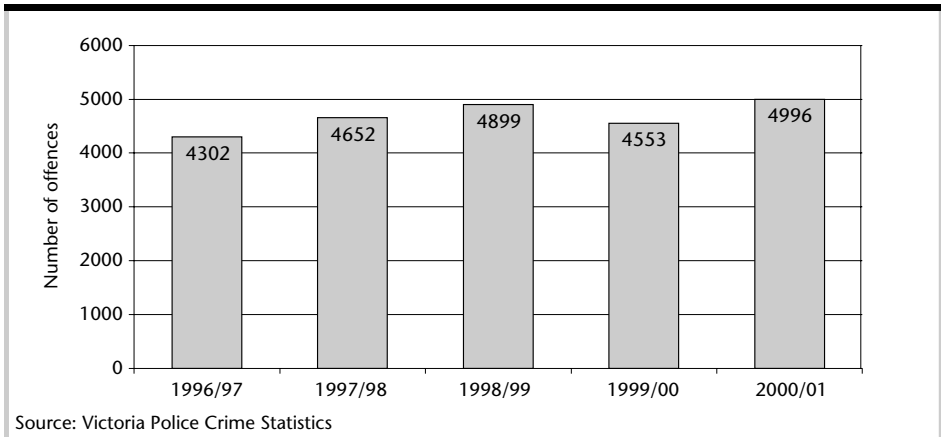
Figure 18: Harassment Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



Weapons/Explosives crimes

This category of crimes includes a wide range of offences associated with the possession, use, storage and sale of weapons and explosives. There has been a significant long-term rise in the total number of crimes in this category, from 4,302 recorded offences in 1996/97 to 4,996 in 2000/01. Interpreting the changes in the overall number of weapons and explosives offences is difficult as there have been a number of important changes in weapons legislation in the last few years. These changes include more stringent controls over firearms and non-firearms weapons. The overall rise in recorded weapons and explosives crimes involves some very large shifts between specific crime types over the same period. In particular, there have been large increases in the number of offences associated with the illegal possession of knives, syringes and other controlled or prohibited hand weapons.

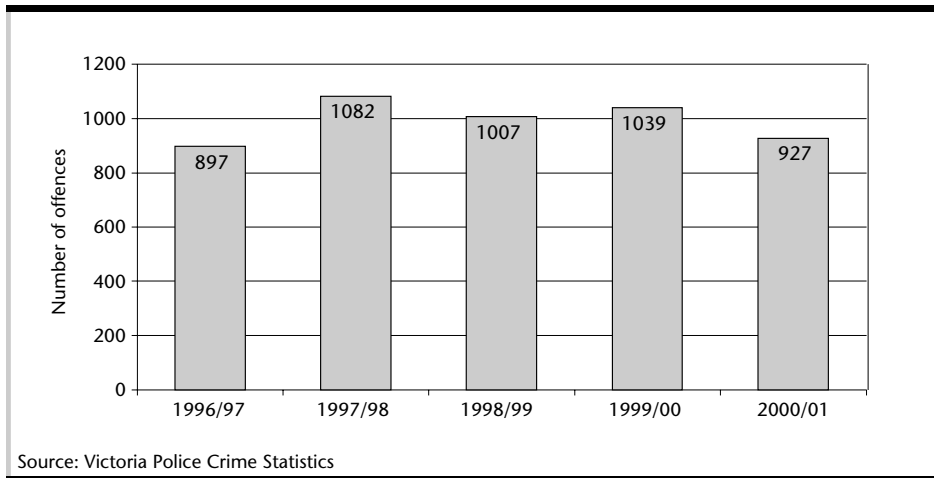
Figure 19: Weapons/Explosives Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



Going equipped to steal

This crime is recorded when police detect someone who is in possession of tools or equipment that is evidence of an intention to commit a criminal act. While the number of going equipped to steal crimes recorded by police has varied considerably from year to year, they do not show any significant upward or downward trend.

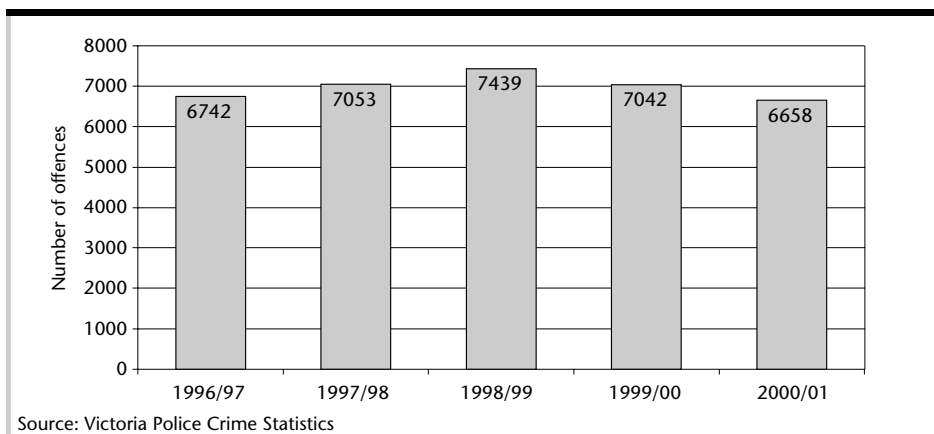
Figure 20: Going Equipped to Steal Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



Other Crime

This category of crime includes all offences that do not fall into any other category. Many of the crimes in this group are breaches of statutory regulations, and include a range of motor vehicle, public transport, boating, fishing, fire control and consumer safety offences. This category also includes a small number of relatively serious offences such as blackmail and extortion. The total number of crimes recorded in this category has been stable for the past five years.

Figure 21: Other Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01



PART E Seasonal Variation in Crime

Seasonal variation is generally understood to mean that rises and falls in a measure occur on a regular 12-monthly cycle of change. In the case of crime statistics, we would expect to see seasonal variation where environmental or other factors that follow an annual cycle (such as temperature, day length, recreational activities or financial or economic activities) have a significant bearing on the rate at which crimes are committed. For example, the rate of assault is generally understood to be higher in the summer than the winter because warmer weather is associated with higher levels of outside activity.

Variability is a measure of how much something changes over time. In order to demonstrate that seasonal variation is present in crime statistics, it is necessary to separate out the variability that occurs on a 12-month cycle from other sources of variability. The main sources of non-seasonal variability in crime statistics are increasing or decreasing trends and random (or irregular) variability. If the amount of seasonal variability is small compared with variability from other sources, then it will be difficult to show statistically significant seasonal trends. As irregular variability tends to be relatively more important for crimes that are infrequent (for example, homicide), it is usually only possible to demonstrate seasonal variation for high-volume crimes.

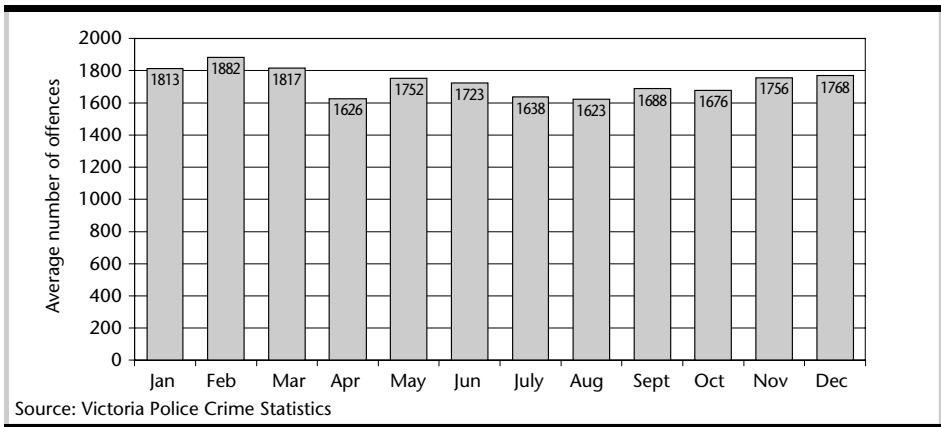
In the following analysis, seasonal variability is examined for three forms of crime: assault, motor vehicle theft and drug consumer crimes. Assault is a form of crime known to be subject to regular seasonal changes, and for the past five years rates of assault have been relatively stable. Assault is the most common form of crime against the person, with around 20,000 crimes recorded each year in Victoria. Motor vehicle theft is a common form of property crime, with in excess of 30,000 crimes recorded each year. Unlike assault, rates of motor vehicle theft have shown a significant upward trend for the past five years. Between 9,000 and 12,000 drug consumer offences were recorded each year between 1996/97 and 2000/01. These crimes are frequently recorded as a result of police activity directed at street crime, and drug consumer offences are not usually regarded as showing seasonal variation.

Understanding seasonal variation typically requires long data series in order to separate out seasonal effects from the influence of other trends and random variation. A rule of thumb is that ten years of data may be required to accurately measure seasonal effects. The five years of data used in this analysis is sufficient only to show seasonal for a limited number of crimes where seasonal factors are large compared with other factors.

12. Seasonality in assault

The simplest way to examine seasonality is to consider the average number of crimes recorded in each month of the year. Not all months of the year are the same length – February is 10% shorter than January – so these averages have to be adjusted for a “standardised” month of 30.4 days. Figure 1 shows the average number of assaults recorded by police each “standardised” month over the five years between July 1996 and June 2001. There were 103,745 assaults recorded by the Victoria Police over this five-year period. If there were no seasonal variation at all, it would be expected that there would be an average of 1,730 assaults recorded each month. However, Figure 22 shows that there was a substantial amount of variation in the monthly averages. In January, February and March, the monthly average number of assaults exceeded 1,800 while in April, July, August, September and October the monthly average was below 1,700. This kind of pattern of monthly variations fits our expectation of how assault should vary, with higher rates when the weather is warm and lower rates when it is cold. This seasonal variation is probably mainly the result of the influence of temperature and day length on people’s activity patterns. When the weather is warm and the nights are short, people are more likely to be in situations where assault is more likely: for example, out at licensed venues or on the street at night. Seasonal patterns of employment or labour movement may also have an impact on assault rates.

Figure 22: Seasonality in Assault Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01 (Month length adjusted)

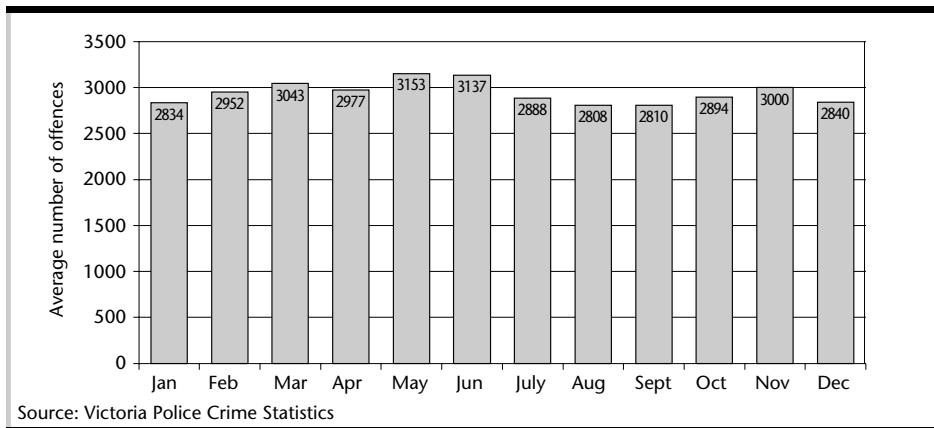


However, it should be noted that seasonal variation is relatively small in relation to the overall average rate of assaults. The highest monthly average is only 9% higher than the monthly average across the five years, and the lowest monthly average is 9% lower than the five-year average. In comparison, the variation in the number of assaults *within* a given month is typically plus or minus 10% to 12%. For example, the monthly average for March of 1,851 is the arithmetic mean of the March counts for 1997 (1,703 assaults), 1998 (1,772 assaults), 1999 (1,921 assaults), 2000 (1,786 assaults) and 2001 (2,075 assaults). So, in the case of assault, seasonal variation is important, but seasonal factors account for less than half of the variation in the number of assaults recorded each month.

13. Seasonality in theft of motor vehicles

A total of 176,652 thefts of motor vehicles were recorded by the Victoria police over the five years between July 1996 and June 2001, or an average of 2,944 each month. Figure 23 shows the average number of motor vehicle thefts recorded in each "standardised" month. The seasonal pattern of motor vehicle thefts is quite distinct from that of assault, with higher values in the months of March, May, June and November and lower values in August, September and December. The monthly seasonal variation is smaller than that for assault, with the highest monthly average being 7% higher than the five-year average, and the lowest monthly average 4% lower than the five-year average.

Figure 23: Seasonality in Motor Vehicle Theft Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01 (Month length adjusted)



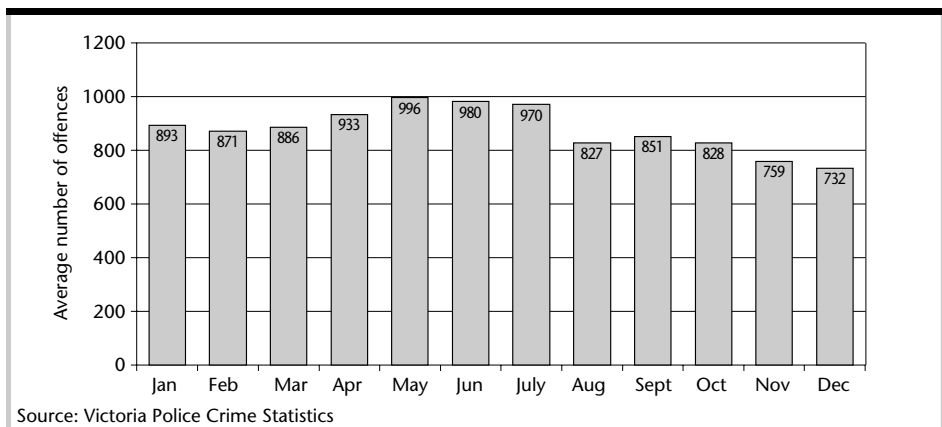
Interpreting seasonal patterns in motor vehicle theft is more complex than is the case for assault because the number of motor vehicle thefts has increased over the five years by around 8% per year. That is, the impact of the trend increase in motor vehicle theft is greater than the impact of seasonal variation. In addition, the number of motor vehicle thefts recorded in a month is also subject to random (irregular) variation, and the amount of irregular variation is also larger than that due to seasonal factors. Thus, while motor vehicle theft does show seasonal variation, this factor is less important in understanding why the number of motor vehicle thefts vary from month to month than is the case for assault.

14. Seasonality in drug consumer crimes

There were 52,627 drug possession and use offences recorded by the Victoria Police between July 1996 and June 2001, or an average of 877 offences a month. The monthly average number of offences recorded is more variable than either assault or motor vehicle theft. The highest monthly average, in May, is 14% higher than the average across all months, and the lowest monthly average is 20% lower than the 12-month average (see Figure 24). The seasonal pattern appears to show high levels of drug consumer crime in the April to July period, and low levels in August and October to December.

However, the seasonal pattern for drug consumer crimes shows some anomalies. There is a sharp fall of 15% in the number of crimes recorded between July and August, and an even more dramatic rise (21%) between December and January. An important factor in understanding seasonal patterns in drug consumer crimes is that the number of crimes recorded in any month shows around twice the variability of assault and about 50% more variability than motor vehicle theft. These offences are commonly detected as a result of some targeted police activity, and the greater degree of month-to-month variability may be partly a reflection of the way that police resources are directed at the control of drug use. The seasonal variation in the number of drug consumer crimes recorded is small compared with the amount of irregular variation, and it is difficult to attribute any meaningful seasonal pattern to drug consumer offences.

Figure 24: Seasonality in Drug Consumer Crimes – 1996/97 to 2000/01 (Month length adjusted)



15. Implications for crime statistics

This analysis shows that, for some offences, there are regular seasonal patterns of rises and falls that need to be taken into account when considering changes in crime rates. All other things being equal, the number of assaults reported during the first quarter of a year (January to March) is likely to be approximately 10% higher than the number recorded during the last quarter of the preceding year (October to December). Crime rate comparisons should therefore be made on the basis of equivalent time periods. These seasonal changes do not have any effect on trends measured over periods of years. In addition, the size of seasonal changes is usually small compared with the month-to-month irregular variability that is present in most crime statistics series.

PART F **Gaining a Better Understanding of Crime Trends**

16. What do crime statistics tell us about crime?

The picture of crime in Victoria that emerges from the statistics compiled by the Victoria Police is a complex one. On the one hand, there are several forms of crime that have shown substantial increases over the past two to five years. The most notable increasing trend has been the rise in theft offences. In addition, several other forms of offending related to the illegal acquisition of property have also shown significant upward trends. These include robbery, burglary of non-residential premises and handling stolen goods.

However, the rise in theft-related crimes is not part of a general rise in crime. The total number of crimes against the person has been stable for at least the last five years, and non-rape sex offences are in decline. The number of drug provider offences recorded is stable, and the number of drug consumer offences has fallen. Many forms of public order and public behaviour offences are also in decline. Even some forms of property crime have declined over the past five years.

This pattern of some crimes increasing while others remain stable or fall is hard to explain. In Chapter 6 it was noted that changes in the state's population probably do not explain rising crime rates. Even though the population is getting larger over time, all of this growth is in the older age groups that contribute little to the total amount of crime. One thing is clear. Aggregate counts of crime such as those presented in this report can only tell us a limited amount about the factors that account for crime rates. The following chapters review some possible explanations for Victoria's patterns of crime and consider what kind of crime statistics we need to have in order to know more about the causes of crime and the most appropriate ways to respond to it.

Regional variations in crime

One of the major limitations of the statistics presented in this report is that they show the patterns of crime across the whole of Victoria. One of the features of crime is that it tends to be unevenly distributed across different areas. Urban areas tend to have higher rates of crime than rural areas, areas of high population mobility tend to have more crime than areas of low population mobility, and areas experiencing economic and social stress tend to have higher rates of crime than those that are economically and socially stable. The Melbourne CBD has a distinctive pattern of crime associated with the large flows of people who move in and out of the city for work, shopping and leisure. Some kinds of crime, such as robbery, are highly localised. The majority of robberies take place in a relatively small number of localities.

The problem with “whole of state” crime statistics is that they may obscure important regional and local differences in crime patterns and trends. These regional and local crime patterns may in turn be important in understanding how people perceive crime. A rise in the total amount of a crime may mean that crime rates have risen in some areas and fallen in others. Alternatively, a crime that was highly localised may have become more widespread.

The crime statistics published by the Victoria Police do include breakdowns by postcode and Police Region. However, neither of these ways of looking at the spatial distribution of crime is entirely satisfactory. Crime counted at postcode level is too variable from year to year for meaningful trends to be discerned. Moreover, the counts currently published aggregate all crimes in a postcode, so that the different patterns shown by different crimes are not apparent. Police Regions are essentially administrative boundaries and include a mix of types of areas. For example, Victoria Police Region 2 includes the Geelong metropolitan area, the regional cities of Ballarat, Horsham and Warrnambool, country towns and rural areas. Counts at Police Region level have the same limitations as whole of state statistics in that they obscure the differences that exist between different types of areas.

An alternative way to understand how crime patterns differ between areas is to aggregate statistics across Local Government Areas (LGAs) or state regional boundaries. Crime statistics at an LGA level would allow comparisons to be made between areas that have similar demographic, social and economic characteristics. LGA crime data would mean that the kind of analysis undertaken by the Committee in relation to crime in the Melbourne CBD could be repeated across a wide variety of communities within the state. The Committee has sought area-coded data from the Victoria Police and anticipates that the next crime trends report will include analysis of crime patterns at LGA level.

Victim-based statistics

Knowing who are the victims of crime is a key requirement in understanding crime. The characteristics of victims can tell us about several fundamental aspects of crime. Crime victimisation tends to be very unevenly distributed across the population. Most people are never or rarely victimised, while a small proportion of the population tends to suffer multiple episodes of victimisation. The best way to understand these patterns of crime victimisation is through population surveys. However, surveys are expensive, usually only take place every few years and can only measure crime victimisation for types of crime that are relatively common. Victim-based police crime statistics are an important way to relate information from victimisation surveys to crime in general.

Another reason for using victim-based crime statistics is that crime rates change when the reporting patterns of victims change. The rise in the number of sexual assaults in the late 1980s and early 1990s was partly attributable to increased reporting by victims. Again, victim-based statistics from police statistics are most useful when they supplement statistics on crime reporting patterns derived from victimisation surveys.

The statistics published by the Victoria Police contain useful information about the age and sex of victims and the number of times a person experiences victimisation during each year. The national crime statistics published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics also include information about the relationship between the victim and offender. In order to fully understand changing patterns of crime victimisation these statistics need to be analysed over time and across different regions.

Offender-based statistics

Some of the most important explanatory variables about crime are concerned with the characteristics of offenders. Like victimisation, offending is unevenly distributed across the population with most people committing none or few offences and a small proportion of the population committing the majority of crimes. The extent and frequency of offending is strongly related to sex, age, socio-economic status, child neglect and delinquency. The rise in property crime is almost certainly explained partly by the extent of drug abuse and drug dependence in the community.

The crime statistics published by the Victoria Police include information about the age, sex, racial appearance and country of birth of offenders, the number of offenders processed for each criminal incident, and the manner in which detected offenders are dealt with (by arrest, caution, summons or in other ways). In addition, counts of distinct offenders processed provide a measure of how offending is distributed across the population.

Offender-based statistics have an important limitation in that they are only available for crimes where an offender has been identified and processed by police. For some crimes, especially most property crimes, offenders are identified in only a relatively small proportion of cases. As a result, trends in offender-based statistics may indicate changes in the allocation of police resources or in the successful investigation of crimes.

Changes within crime types

Sometimes trends evident in the crime types that form the basis of current crime statistics are the result of more specific changes in the crimes that make up these general categories. For example, it was noted earlier in this report that the general trend in weapons and explosives crimes is the result of much more complex changes in the specific statutory and common law crime categories within this general crime type. These specific changes are in turn the result of legislative reforms associated with the regulation of firearms and other weapons. These specific changes provide a much better understanding of the impact of these legislative reforms and the way that police have enforced them than can be gained by examining the general trend. Other instances where changes in individual crime categories are important include homicide, justice procedure, harassment and other crime types.

Accuracy and reliability of crime statistics

Ultimately, the usefulness of crime statistics as a basis for understanding crime depends on their accuracy and reliability. Two key factors that determine the quality of crime statistics are the administrative systems used to collect, process and output crime statistics, and the procedural rules that police apply when determining how to encode the features of criminal incidents on these administrative systems. The development of computer-based information systems has had a substantial impact on the range and quality of statistics about crime. There are significant variations between Australian jurisdictions in the way that police enter crime reports into their central records computer system. The Committee has previously expressed its concerns about the potential for error inherent in the arrangement whereby Victoria Police members are required to hand write crime reports and fax them to the Central Data Entry Bureau for entry onto LEAP.

It is inevitable that police computer-based systems will continue to develop. For example, most Australian police forces are in the process of adopting in-car computer terminals linked to call-out systems and crime databases. These changes will inevitably have an impact on the amount of crime information that can be translated into crime statistics.

A recent review of crime statistics in the United Kingdom carried out by the Home Office found that one of the most important sources of variation in crime statistics was the extent to which police counted and classified crime on an evidentiary versus prima facie basis (Simmons 2000). The Home Office review also

recommended that police crime statistics should include additional information that would assist users to correctly interpret crime patterns. The additional information sought by the Home Office includes many of the issues discussed above: repeat victimisation, victim characteristics including the relationship between victims and offenders, and other information relating to the circumstances of the crime.

The crime statistics produced by Victoria Police are currently the subject of a review being conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC). The Terms of Reference for this review are shown in Appendix 3. The Committee hopes that the AIC's report will make an important contribution to the continued development of crime statistics in Victoria and will ultimately lead to a better understanding of the nature of crime and how best to respond to it.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Offence Categories Used by LEAP

There are more than 4,000 individual statutory and common law offences recorded in LEAP.² The Victoria Police then group these offences into 27 offence categories. These categories are then presented in four general classes: Crime Against the Person, Crime Against Property, Drug Crimes and Other Crime (Victoria Police 2001b, p. 6). Details of the offence categories occurring within these four main classes of crime are given below.

Crime Against the Person

Homicide

Homicide is the unlawful killing, or attempted killing or conspiracy to kill someone. This category includes murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, culpable driving, failure to stop/assist at an accident resulting in death, and abortion.

Rape

Rape crimes are sexual assaults that involve the sexual penetration (either actual or attempted) of the victim. This category includes rape, buggery with a person under 14, and buggery.

Sex (non-rape)

This category includes all sexual offences that do not amount to rape. They include Indecent assault, Wilful and obscene exposure in public, Indecent act with child under 16, Sexual penetration person 10–16, Incest, Carnal Knowledge and Gross indecency.

Robbery

Robbery involves the deprivation of property from a victim by the use or threatened use of force or any other coercive measure. This category includes Armed robbery, Robbery and Assault with intent to rob. Crimes involving an unlawful demand for money or other property by the threat to use a coercive

² Victoria Police offence statistical recording and reporting categories do not necessarily conform to legal definitions.

measure at some future time are classified as Blackmail and extortion offences and are counted in the Other Crime category.

Assault

Assaults are crimes involving the direct infliction (or threatened infliction) of force, injury or violence on a person. This category includes Unlawful assault, Intentionally cause injury, Recklessly cause injury, Assault police, Assault with weapon/instrument and Make threats to kill.

Kidnap/Abduction

Kidnapping and abduction crimes involve the unlawful taking away of another person against that person's will, or against the will of any person having lawful custody of the person abducted. This category includes False imprisonment, Abduction for the act of sexual penetration, Kidnap and Unlawful and injurious imprisonment.

Crime Against Property

Arson

Arson is the willful destruction or damage of property by fire or explosion. This category includes Criminal damage by fire (Arson), Criminal damage (intentionally damage/destroy), Set fire to litter receptacle and Light/use fire and destroy/damage property.

Property Damage

Property damage crimes involve the destruction, damage or defacing of any property by a means other than fire or explosion. This category includes Criminal damage, Wilful damage/injure property, Possess article for criminal damage, and Kill homing pigeon offences. In 1996/1997 Victoria Police changed the name of this offence category from Criminal Damage to Property Damage. It should be noted that where property is damaged in the course of unlawful entry to a property, this will usually be counted under Burglary.

Burglary (Aggravated)

Aggravated Burglary involves the illegal entry of a premises with the intention to commit an offence, where the person entering the property is armed, or enters in the knowledge that it is occupied. This category includes Aggravated burglary, Aggravated burglary-person present, Aggravated burglary offensive weapon and Aggravated burglary–firearm offences.

Burglary (Residential)

Burglary (Residential) involves the illegal entry of a residential premises with the intention to commit an offence. This category includes Burglary, Enter Building to commit offence–assault.

Burglary (Other)

Burglary (Other) involves the illegal entry of a non-residential premises with the intention to commit an offence. This category includes Burglary, Enter Building to commit offence–assault.

Deception

Deception crimes involve the use of deception, secret agreements or false instruments with the intention of dishonestly obtaining property, services or other advantage. This category includes Obtain property by deception, Obtain financial advantage by deception and Make false document offences (these are the most commonly recorded).

Handle Stolen Goods

This category includes offences arising from receiving, handling or processing money or goods that have been obtained illegally. Includes Handle/receive/retain stolen, Unlawful possession and Possess property being proceeds of crime offences (these are the most commonly recorded).

Theft from Motor Vehicle

Theft from motor vehicle involves illegally taking parts, goods or money from another person's motor vehicle.

Theft (Shopsteal)

The unlawful taking of retail goods from a shop. Thefts from commercial or retail premises that occur after business hours, or outside the retail area of the premises, may be classified as Other theft.

Theft of Motor Vehicle

Theft from motor vehicle involves taking another person's motor vehicle illegally with the intention of depriving that person of its use.

Theft of Bicycle

Theft of bicycle.

Theft (Other)

The Theft (Other) category comprises ten offences including the stealing of mail from the post and the stealing of Commonwealth property. However, the single offence of 'Theft' represents the overwhelming proportion of offences in the Theft (Other) category.

Drug Crime***Drug (Cultivate, Manufacture, Traffic)***

The cultivation, manufacture, sale or supply of commercial quantities of illicit drugs or other controlled substances. This crime category includes Traffic heroin, Traffic cannabis and Traffic amphetamines.

Drug (Possess, Use)

The possession of a non-commercial quantity of illicit drugs or the use of illicit drugs. This crime category includes Possess of heroin, Use of heroin, Possess amphetamines, Use of amphetamines.

Other Crime

Going Equipped to Steal

Possessing tools, equipment or other material that indicates an intention to commit a criminal act.

Justice Procedures

The crimes included in this category are generally acts or omissions that interfere with the effective operation of the justice system, or contravene orders made by courts or other officials. This crime types includes Breach of intervention, Resist police/resist arrest, and Fail to answer bail.

Regulated Public Order

Offences involving conduct that is regulated or prohibited on moral or ethical grounds. Crimes within this category include Prostitution-loiter for prostitution, Minor possess liquor, Minor consume liquor offences.

Weapons Explosives

Offences relating to the possession, storage or use of weapons or explosives, including both regulated and prohibited weapons. Crimes within this category include Possess regulated weapon, Posses/carry/use unlicensed gun, Possess a dangerous article and Prohibited person possess a firearm.

Harassment

Actions which harass or are intended to harass, threaten or invade the privacy of an individual. Crimes within this category include Use phone service to menace/harass/offend, Stalk another person, Use telecommunications service to menace, Use telecommunications service to harass and Knowingly interfere with facility.

Behaviour in Public

Offences involving personal conduct that involves or may lead to a breach of public order. Crimes within this category include Behave in an offensive manner in a public place, Use indecent language in a public place, Drunk in a public place and Loiter with intent to commit an indictable offence.

Other Offences

A crime category made up of all crimes that do not fall into any other category. Includes Unlawfully on premises, Tamper with motor vehicle, Licensed Motor Car Trader fail to make entries in dealings book, Interfere with motor vehicle, Beg alms, Bomb hoax-make statement/convey information and Travel without a valid ticket (these are among the most common offences).

Appendix 2: Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into Motor Vehicle Theft

Terms of Reference

A resolution passed by the Legislative Council on Wednesday 21 November 2001.

That pursuant to the *Parliamentary Committees Act 1968*, the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee be required to inquire into, consider and report by 31 October 2002 on the causes for, and effect of, the significant increase in the rate of vehicle theft in Victoria, including the so-called “re-birthing” of stolen vehicles, and to make recommendations as to how vehicle theft may be addressed.

Appendix 3: Terms of Reference for Victoria Police Crime Statistics Data Review

Terms of Reference

Review the current policies, procedures and practices relating to the collection, collation and storage of crime data.

This will include an assessment of:

1. the process by which Victorian Police crime counting and classification rules are applied to crime allegations,
2. the data quality and monitoring mechanisms for crime statistics and clearance data,
3. the methods and practices in relation to the recording and inclusion of crime data onto the LEAP system,
4. the reliability and veracity of the compilation of Victoria Police statistics; and
5. the analytical programs and tools used to generate crime data.

Key aspects of the review

The review will involved a number of aspects:

1. An assessment of the policy and practices of crime recording in Victoria Police procedures
2. A tracking exercise to monitor what happens to reports of crime made by telephone to the police
3. An assessment of internal audits of the LEAP system
4. An assessment of the 'recording shortfall' between calls for service and Victorian police recorded crime statistics
5. A survey of a range of officers using hypothetical crime scenarios to assess understanding of the Counting Rules.

Deliverable

A preliminary report is to be provided to the Chief Commissioner by 1 November 2001.

A final report is to be provided to the Chief Commissioner by 1 December 2001.

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