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AN UPDATE OF LONG-TERM TRENDS IN PROPERTY AND VIOLENT CRIME IN NEW SOUTH WALES: 1990-2008

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This paper describes trends in the annual recorded incidence of 10 major categories of property and violent crime for the period 1990 to 2008 in New South Wales. The data presented here are an update of the property and violent crime trends reported in Crime and Justice Bulletin Number 90. Using Kendall's trend test on the 19 annual rates[1] for each offence category, we report the same trends as last year. That is, significant long-term upward trends remain current for assault and sexual assault, whilst murder, robbery with a firearm and motor vehicle theft remain on a long term significant downward trend. The remaining five categories, other sexual offences[2], robbery without a weapon, robbery with a weapon not a firearm, break and enter - dwelling and break and enter - non-dwelling continue to maintain their long term stable result.

DATA SOURCES

With the exception of murder, the data presented here refer to the number of police recorded criminal incidents per 100,000 population. For murder, rates are calculated on the numbers of murder victims per 100,000 population. Data from the NSW Police Force Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) have been used to calculate offence rates for the period 1995-2008. Criminal incident data for 1994 and for the years prior to the introduction of COPS have been taken from the Bureau's recorded crime statistics report series, *NSW Recorded Crime Statistics.*

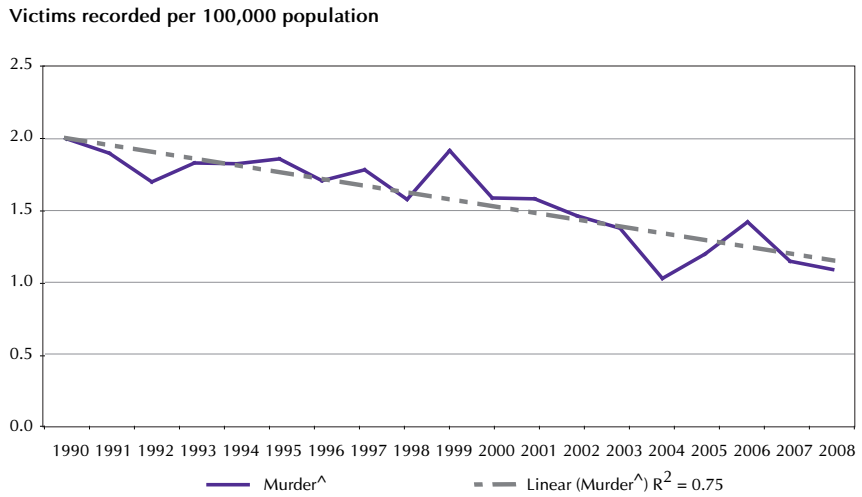
Given that recorded crime data include only crimes that come to the attention of the police and not all criminal acts are reported to the authorities, the trends in recorded crime presented here should be compared with data from crime victim surveys. A summary of these data for the period to 2004 is provided in Moffatt and Poynton (2006). The Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Crime and Safety NSW April 2008, Cat No. 4509.1, ABS, Sydney,* contains the most recent data.

PERSONAL CRIME

Figure 1 shows the number of *murder* victims in NSW per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2008. Figures 2, 3 and 4 show the number of recorded *assault, sexual offences* and *robbery* incidents per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2008, respectively. The major points to note from these figures are:

- A significant downward trend is apparent in the NSW *murder* rate (down 46% since 1990). Apart from the 2004 recorded rate of 1.0 murder victims per 100,000 population (which was below the long-term linear trend), the

Figure 1: Murder rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2008



^ NB: Victims are recorded per 100,000 population for murder

Figure 2: Assault rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2008

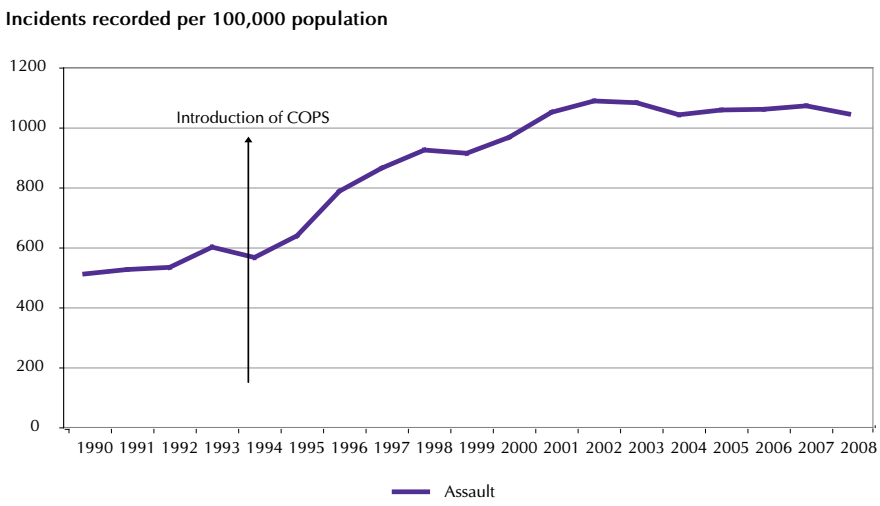


Figure 3: Sexual offence rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2008

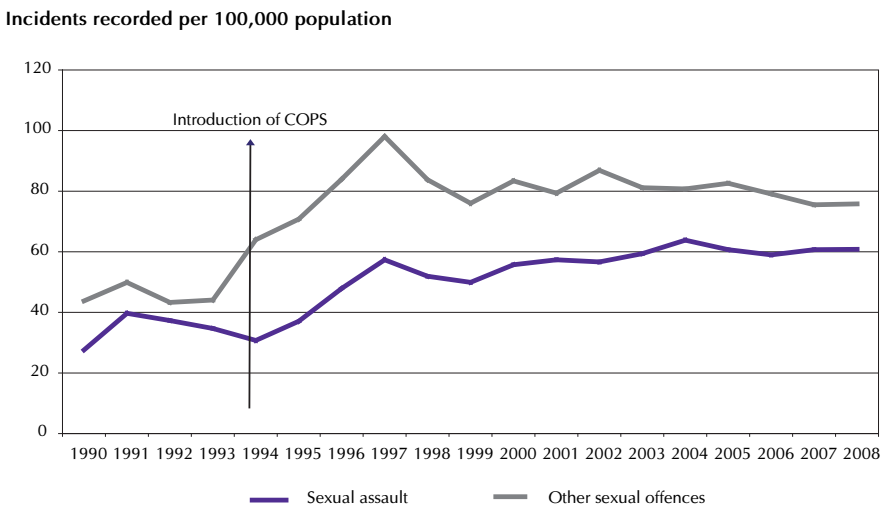
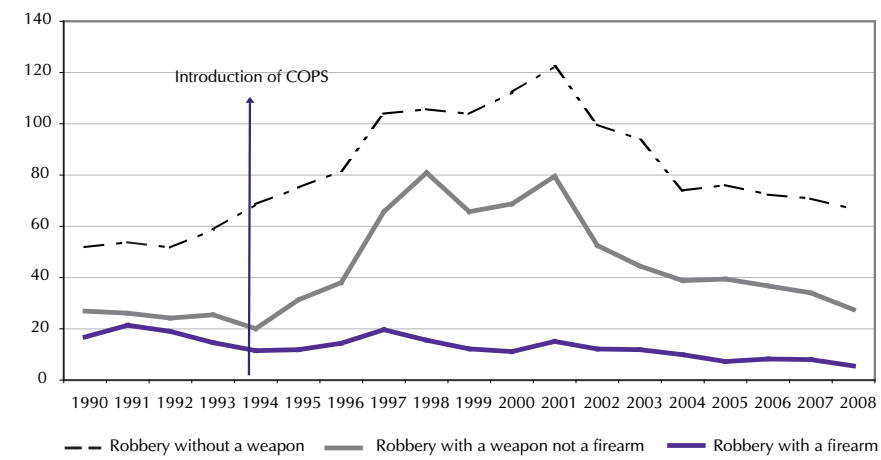


Figure 4: Robbery rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2008



recent annual *murder* rates, (1.1 in 2008), have continued back on trend showing strong linearity with the r^2 measure of goodness of fit remaining around 0.75. The 2006 *murder* rate (1.4) was slightly above trend after a spike of 21 murders in January 2006.

- A significant upward trend in the NSW *assault* rate (up 105% since 1990). However the past eight years have remained statistically stable. In the early 1990's the recorded *assault* rate was about 500 incidents per 100,000 population. However, by 2001 the recorded *assault* rate had climbed to over 1,000 incidents per 100,000 population and has remained close to that rate over the past eight years.

- Over the period 1990-2008 NSW recorded increases in the crime rate of both *sexual assault* (up 120%) and *other sexual offences*[2] (up 73%). In both cases, however, most of the increase occurred in the mid to late 1990s and the statistical trend test for *other sexual offences* after having changed from upward to stable during the 12 months prior to the last report, now remains at stable. After 1997 the recorded rate of *sexual assault* fell back from 57 incidents to around 50 incidents per 100,000, before slowly increasing to around 60 incidents per 100,000 persons, where it currently remains. The recorded rate of *other sexual offences*[2], on the other hand, fell back from 98 to around 80 incidents per 100,000 of population in 1998, whereupon it has remained relatively stable.

- Recorded rates of *robbery without a weapon* and *robbery with a weapon not a firearm* reflect levels last seen around 1994 and continue to show declines (see Figure 4), even

though the long term trends are still registering as statistically stable. A significant and consistent downward trend continues in the NSW rate of *robbery with a firearm* (down by 67% from 1990 to 2008). The 2008 rate is well below half of the early 1990s rate, when fitted to a linear trend (see Figure 4a).

PROPERTY CRIME

Figure 5 shows trends in the recorded rates of three major theft categories: *break and enter - dwelling, break and enter - non-dwelling* and *motor vehicle theft.* The major points to note from this figure are:

- Recorded rates of *motor vehicle theft* continue to decline significantly (down by 62%) since 1990. After a fall in this theft category in the early part of last decade the incident rate for *motor vehicle theft* began to increase slightly from 1993 onwards. From about 1997, the rate of *motor vehicle theft* stabilised at around 800 incidents per 100,000 persons and then dropped sharply from 2001 onwards, having registered a 57 per cent fall for the period 2001 to 2008. The rates of *motor vehicle theft* and *break and enter - non-dwelling* continue to track one another as has been the case since the late 1999.

- Crime rates for burglary offences fell slightly in the early part of last decade but from about 1993 onwards began to increase. The increase was particularly marked in the case of *break and enter - non-dwelling,* which rose by 39 per cent between 1993 and 2001. From 2001 onwards, however, burglary offences began to fall sharply, with *break and enter - dwelling* falling by 47 per cent and *break and enter - non-dwelling* falling by 58 per cent.

Figure 4a: Robbery with a firearm rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2008

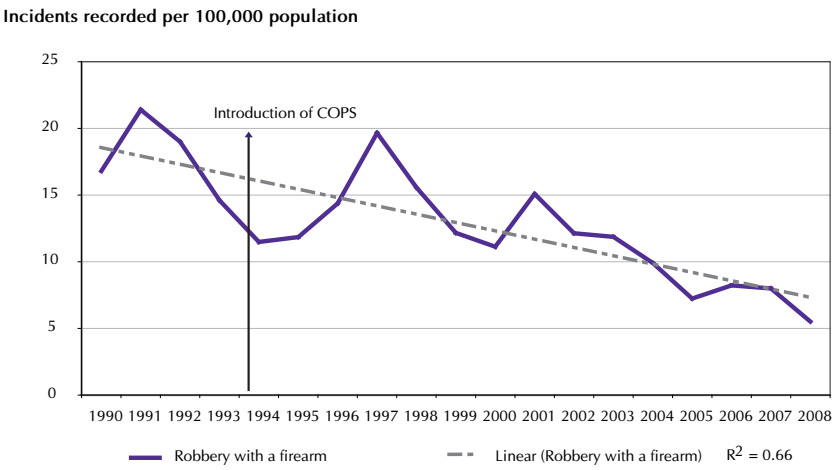
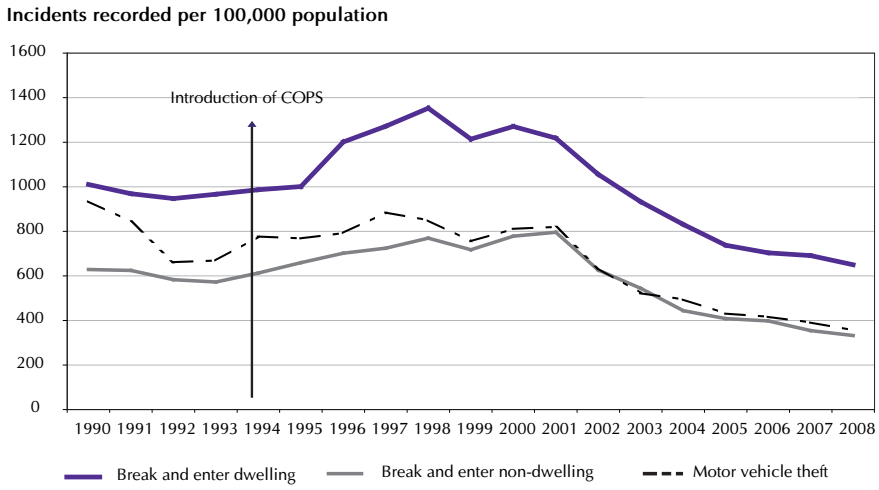


Figure 5: Burglary and motor vehicle theft rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2008



Recorded rates of *burglary* and *motor vehicle theft* are now well below their 1990 levels.

NOTES

1. For the rate calculations, population data were obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics publication: Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2006-07, Cat. No. 3218.0 (for 2006 and 2007 population estimates). As no population estimates were available for 2008 when this report was published, rates for 2008 were calculated using 2007 population estimates.

2. The offence category 'other sexual offences' includes recorded incidents of indecent assault, acts of indecency and other sexual offences (e.g. wilful and obscene exposure, peep or pry).

REFERENCES

Moffatt & Poynton 2006, 'Long term trends in property and violent crime in NSW: 1990-2004', *Crime and Justice Bulletin,* no. 90, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Sydney.

APPENDIX

Table A1: Number of criminal incidents recorded by the NSW Police Force by year and offence type

Year	Murder^	Assault	Sexual assault	Other sexual offences	Robbery without a weapon	Robbery with a firearm	Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	Break and enter dwelling	Break and enter non-dwelling	Motor vehicle theft
1990	119	29,776	1,606	2,552	3,022	981	1,568	58,862	36,639	54,488
1991	115	31,014	2,343	2,942	3,173	1,265	1,542	57,155	36,838	49,758
1992	101	31,773	2,220	2,583	3,080	1,132	1,444	56,437	34,754	39,423
1993	110	36,076	2,083	2,646	3,525	877	1,528	58,036	34,379	40,169
1994	83	25,732	1,397	2,908	3,120	522	912	44,850	27,858	35,304
1995	114	39,132	2,272	4,337	4,601	726	1,922	61,336	40,393	47,078
1996	106	48,869	2,973	5,211	5,067	892	2,359	74,546	43,551	49,187
1997	112	54,304	3,601	6,156	6,526	1,234	4,125	79,838	45,467	55,539
1998	100	58,672	3,291	5,310	6,700	987	5,130	85,768	48,772	53,851
1999	123	58,646	3,201	4,874	6,658	780	4,213	77,852	45,995	48,401
2000	103	62,797	3,615	5,408	7,284	722	4,459	82,427	50,470	52,624
2001	104	69,165	3,771	5,217	8,055	992	5,229	80,121	52,328	53,932
2002	97	72,279	3,758	5,763	6,614	805	3,486	70,042	41,523	42,078
2003	92	72,419	3,968	5,422	6,270	793	2,971	62,327	36,374	34,898
2004	69	70,122	4,291	5,426	4,973	666	2,609	55,853	29,833	33,234
2005	81	71,718	4,109	5,591	5,152	490	2,668	49,935	27,649	29,171
2006	97	72,490	4,028	5,400	4,941	562	2,509	48,038	27,153	28,441
2007	79	73,932	4,182	5,203	4,881	551	2,344	47,610	24,411	26,924
2008	75	72,057	4,190	5,223	4,590	380	1,897	44,782	22,889	24,523

^ *For murder, the number shown is the number of recorded victims rather than criminal incidents*

Table A2: Number of criminal incidents recorded by the NSW Police Force per 100,000 population by year and offence type

Year	Murder^	Assault	Sexual assault	Other sexual offences	Robbery without a weapon	Robbery with a firearm	Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	Break and enter dwelling	Break and enter non-dwelling	Motor vehicle theft
1990	2.0	511.0	27.6	43.8	51.9	16.8	26.9	1010.2	628.8	935.1
1991	1.9	525.8	39.7	49.9	53.8	21.4	26.1	968.9	624.5	843.5
1992	1.7	533.2	37.3	43.3	51.7	19.0	24.2	947.1	583.2	661.6
1993	1.8	600.8	34.7	44.1	58.7	14.6	25.4	966.5	572.5	668.9
1994	1.8	566.1	30.7	64.0	68.6	11.5	20.1	986.8	612.9	776.7
1995	1.9	638.7	37.1	70.8	75.1	11.8	31.4	1001.1	659.3	768.4
1996	1.7	787.6	47.9	84.0	81.7	14.4	38.0	1201.4	701.9	792.7
1997	1.8	865.1	57.4	98.1	104.0	19.7	65.7	1271.9	724.3	884.8
1998	1.6	925.6	51.9	83.8	105.7	15.6	80.9	1353.0	769.4	849.5
1999	1.9	914.7	49.9	76.0	103.8	12.2	65.7	1214.3	717.4	754.9
2000	1.6	968.2	55.7	83.4	112.3	11.1	68.7	1270.8	778.1	811.3
2001	1.6	1051.9	57.4	79.3	122.5	15.1	79.5	1218.5	795.8	820.2
2002	1.5	1090.2	56.7	86.9	99.8	12.1	52.6	1056.5	626.3	634.7
2003	1.4	1085.0	59.5	81.2	93.9	11.9	44.5	933.8	545.0	522.9
2004	1.0	1045.0	63.9	80.9	74.1	9.9	38.9	832.3	444.6	495.3
2005	1.2	1061.2	60.8	82.7	76.2	7.3	39.5	738.9	409.1	431.6
2006	1.4	1063.3	59.1	79.2	72.5	8.2	36.8	704.7	398.3	417.2
2007	1.1	1073.2	60.7	75.5	70.9	8.0	34.0	691.1	354.3	390.8
2008	1.1	1046.0	60.8	75.8	66.6	5.5	27.5	650.0	332.3	356.0

^ *Victims are recorded per 100,000 population for murder*