

CRIME AND JUSTICE
IN
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
2003

-

OFFENCES REPORTED TO POLICE,
THE VICTIMS AND ALLEGED
PERPETRATORS

A statistical report

OFFICE OF CRIME STATISTICS AND RESEARCH
Attorney-General's Department

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PREFACE

Crime and Justice in South Australia: Offences Reported to Police, the Victims and Alleged Perpetrators is the first of a three volume report on crime and criminal justice statistics in South Australia which, in one form or another, has been published annually by the Office of Crime Statistics since 1987. While Volume 2 deals exclusively with young offenders and the juvenile justice system and Volume 3 focuses on adult courts and correctional services, Volume 1 (ie this volume) contains information on police-related activities for the period 1 January to 31 December 2003.

Five main sections are included in this report, as follows:

- the number of incident reports filed by police;
- the number of offences recorded by police;
- the number of offences cleared by police and the method of clearance;
- characteristics of victims who reported an offence to police; and
- characteristics of alleged perpetrators apprehended by police.

We are currently reviewing and redeveloping the structure and content of this report and it is anticipated that this will be the last *Crime and Justice* series in this format.

Unfortunately the resources associated with these processes have meant that the extent of the descriptive analysis included in this report has been reduced compared to previous years. It is anticipated that the next series of *Crime and Justice* reports will once again include more descriptive analysis of the statistics.

We trust that readers will find the production of three volumes of *Crime and Justice in South Australia* useful and informative.

Joy Wundersitz
Director
Office of Crime Statistics and Research

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INTRODUCTION

This report, covering the period 1 January to 31 December 2003, is the seventeenth *Crime and Justice* report to be based on a calendar year of reporting. Statistics in this report cover five main areas:

- the number of incident reports filed by police;
- the number of offences recorded by police;
- the number of offences cleared by police and the method of clearance;
- the characteristics of victims who reported an offence to police; and
- the characteristics of alleged perpetrators apprehended by police.

Using Crime and Justice reports

As with all quantitative data, the tables in this publication can give rise to misunderstanding and confusion unless assessed carefully. The notes that follow, combined with the detailed explanations outlined in the Appendix, are designed to assist understanding and correct interpretation of the data.

Comprehensiveness

In using this *Crime and Justice* report it is important to understand that it does not provide a comprehensive picture of the incidence and nature of offending in the community. The officially recorded crime statistics contained in this volume are influenced by a number of factors, as described below.

Incidents and offences reported to police

Sections 2, 3 and 4 of this report detail only those incidents and offences actually reported to police or which come to police attention. They are therefore heavily dependent on whether the victim of an offence chooses to report that offence. Victim surveys have indicated that many offences are never reported and so are never counted in official police statistics. The level of under-reporting also varies from one offence category to another. The most recent victimisation survey conducted in South Australia in 2000 showed that, at one end of the spectrum, ninety percent of motor vehicle thefts in South Australia were reported to police, while at the other end of the scale, the level of reporting of non-sexual assaults was 27.3% (ABS, 2001: Cat. No. 4509.4). This means that while police statistics for *larceny or illegal use of a motor vehicle* are likely to provide an accurate insight into the actual incidence of these offences in the community, they significantly underestimate the number of assaults.

Changes in the willingness of victims to report incidents to police will inevitably have an impact on recorded crime trends. In recent years, Governments in all states have introduced a range of measures designed to encourage more victims to report offences

(particularly those involving sexual assault and domestic violence). As a result, any increase in recorded crime levels may be due not to a shift in the actual incidence of illegal behaviour in the community but to a greater willingness by victims to bring those offences to police attention.

In the case of victimless crimes (such as *possess/use drugs*) the identification or detection of an offence rests predominantly with police. Here, official crime statistics may be influenced by policing practices, and in particular by the number and range of specialist operations conducted in any given year. For example, the number of *driving offences* coming to police attention over a given time period will rise significantly if the police dedicate more resources to enforcing motor traffic legislation. In South Australia, police statistics on drink driving offences increased noticeably following the introduction of random breath testing in 1981, with a particularly sharp rise occurring in 1997 when the number of drivers given a random breath test doubled. Survey data collected by the NRMA Road Accident Research Unit at the University of Adelaide indicate, however, that the proportion of individual drivers “over the limit” has actually been decreasing since 1982. Thus, while publicity about drink driving and increased levels of enforcement have served to reduce the actual incidence of this type of offending in the community, the number of officially recorded *drink driving offences* has increased due to greater enforcement activity by police.

The number of incidents and offences recorded by police during a given year are also dependent on how an event reported by a victim or observed by police is interpreted and entered onto the data collection system. While SAPOL has processes in place to provide direction to police officers, final responsibility for deciding whether a particular criminal incident will be recorded and how it will be recorded is still vested in individual officers. For some crimes, a high level of discretion exists in how to classify them. For example, the perceived intent needs to be judged before deciding whether an incident is defined as a *serious assault* or an *attempted murder*. This discretion may lead to some variation from one police officer to another in how they choose to define and record a particular incident. Police also have some discretion in terms of whether to actually file an incident report in the first place. Shifts in how police exercise this discretion will impact on the statistics. For example, it is widely acknowledged that in earlier decades, many domestic violence incidents to which police were called did not result in a formal incident report being filled out because police viewed such incidents as “internal” family matters. However, as the community’s awareness of and concern about domestic violence increased, so police willingness to formally record such incidents also increased. Thus, as with *sexual assault*, any long term upswing in domestic violence assaults over time may be due, not to a change in the actual frequency of such behaviour but to a greater willingness on the part of victims to report the matter to police and to a greater willingness by police to actually lodge an incident report, which will then be counted in the official statistics.

Changes in the efficiency of policing combined with improvements in the technologies available for actually recording data may also affect the official statistics. In some states, for example, police now have access to on-line computer charging which means that at a crime scene, they can enter details of the offence

directly onto a computer rather than having to fill in forms by hand for later data entry. This may lead to improvements in both the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the data.

The influence potentially exerted by these factors on reported crime trends in this State therefore need to be borne in mind when interpreting the statistics contained in this report.

Characteristics of victims and apprehended persons

Similar interpretative issues also apply to Sections 5 and 6 of this report, which detail the characteristics of victims who contact police to report a crime and the characteristics of alleged perpetrators apprehended by police. As demonstrated later in this report, for certain categories of crime such as *property damage*, *serious criminal trespass* and *vehicle theft*, the number of crimes reported to police which are actually 'cleared' by the apprehension of a suspect is relatively low. As a result, those persons who are apprehended may not be representative of all those who actually commit these offences. Similarly, given that for offences such as *sexual assault*, many victims choose not to report the matter to police, it may be that those who do report such incidents differ in some ways from those who decide not to do so.

In summary, official crime statistics should be interpreted with extreme care. To facilitate this, readers are urged to consult the detailed explanatory notes contained in the Appendix.

1

SUMMARY OF 2003 STATISTICS

Summary of 2003 Statistics

Police Incident Reports

- In 2003, 212,094 incident reports were submitted by police. This was 3.0% lower than the preceding year.
- The majority (75.6%) of incident reports submitted in 2003 involved one offence only. The average number of offences per report was 1.34.

Offences recorded by police

- In 2003, there were 284,608 offences recorded by police.
- *Offences against property* dominated, accounting for approximately six in ten offences recorded (59.6%). In contrast, *sexual offences* and *robbery and extortion* each constituted less than 1%, while *drug offences* accounted for only 1.1%. This offence profile was similar to that observed in previous years.
- In 2003, the number of offences recorded by police declined by 4.2%.
- With the exception of *driving offences* and *sexual offences*, all major offence categories recorded a decrease in 2003. The number of *robbery and extortion* offences recorded a decrease of almost 18%.
- The number of *offences against the person, excluding sexual offences* recorded by police decreased in 2003 (by 4.4%). Within this broad category, *assault occasioning* decreased (by 9.7%) as did *other* (generally minor) *assault* (down by 2.4%).
- In 2003, *sexual offences* increased by 10.3%. Within this broad category, the number of recorded *rape* offences increased (by 25.2%), while *indecent assault* offences increased (by 8.7%). However, one sub-category - *incest and other sexual offences* - recorded a slight decrease of 2.1%. It is noted that the 2003 increase in recorded sexual offences in South Australia coincides with the establishment of a Paedophile Task Force (in May 2003) as well as new legislation (in June 2003) to abolish the time limit for the prosecution of certain sexual offences.
- The total number of *robbery* offences recorded by police in 2003 decreased by 17.7%. However, this was due to the substantial decrease in the number of *unarmed robbery* offences (by 29.4%). In contrast, the number of *armed robbery* offences increased by 6.8% between 2002 and 2003.
- The number of recorded *offences against property* decreased by 6.7% in 2003. This was the lowest figure recorded since 1999.

- The number of recorded *serious criminal trespass dwelling** offences declined by 18.5% in 2003 - the largest decrease since this offence was created in 1999. *Serious criminal trespass shop** decreased again in 2003 (by 2.4%) after decreasing by 12.1% in 2002. *Other serious criminal trespass* also decreased again (by 10.0%).
- *Larceny/illegal use of a motor vehicle* declined by 9.1% in 2003. *Interfere with a motor vehicle* decreased by 14.5% in 2003.
- *Larceny from a shop* declined in 2003 (by 19.8%). This was the first decrease since 1998.
- The number of recorded *fraud and misappropriation offences* continued to decrease in 2003 (by 19.4%). The latest figure is the lowest recorded for the past 14 years.
- After recording increases since 1997, the number of total *damage property* offences declined marginally in 2003 (by 0.6%).
- The total number of recorded *driving offences* rose by 4.6% in 2003. This included:
 - a 7.1% increase in *driving licence offences*;
 - a 7.0% increase in *motor vehicle registration offences*; and
 - a 3.0% increase in traffic offences.

However, there was also a 4.6% decrease in *dangerous, reckless or negligent driving*, while the number of recorded *drink driving* offences decreased marginally by 0.3%.

It should be noted though, that the number of *driving offences* recorded is heavily reliant on police enforcement practices, such as the number of random breath tests conducted.

- The number of *drug offences* recorded by police in 2003 decreased by 19.3% following an 18.8% decrease in 2002. All drug offence sub-categories recorded decreases. The number of *possess and/or use drugs* and *possess drug implement* decreased by 15.2% and 35.7% respectively, while *possess for sale/sell drugs* declined by 18.9%. As with *driving offences*, however, the number of such offences recorded in any given year is heavily dependent on police enforcement practices and legislative change. In particular, in 2003, the continuing decrease in

* In calculating the 2003 figures, *break/enter offences* have been combined with the new *criminal trespass offences*. It should be stressed, however, that these are not directly comparable with *break/enter offences* applicable prior to 25 December 1999.

the number of *possess and/or use drugs* offences could be attributable to the introduction in September/October 2001 of the Police Illicit Drugs Diversion Initiative, and to the reduction, in November 2001, of the number of cannabis plants covered by the Cannabis Expiation Notice Scheme.

- *Offences against good order* decreased by 1.7% in 2003. However, due to increases between 2000 and 2002, the latest figure is still the second highest recorded since 1992.

Location of offences recorded

- In 2003, the LGA of Adelaide recorded the highest rate of offending per 1,000 population (1,645.8). This was followed by Coober Pedy (651.3), Unincorporated South Australia (421.3), Port Augusta (334.2), Ceduna (311.2), Port Adelaide Enfield (278.6) and Playford (265.3).
- The LGA of Adelaide also had the highest rate of offences against the person (161.2 per 1,000 population). The LGA with the second highest rate was Coober Pedy (61.6), followed by Unincorporated South Australia (47.8), Ceduna (37.0), Port Augusta (34.1), Playford (25.1) and Murray Bridge (24.9).
- The highest rate for serious criminal trespass was also recorded by the LGA of Adelaide (48.1 per 1,000 dwelling). This was followed by Coober Pedy (46.0), Walkerville (41.6), Playford (40.5), Port Adelaide Enfield (40.3), Charles Sturt (34.1) and Prospect (32.3).
- In 2003, the Northern Statistical Division recorded the highest rate of *offences against the person* (22.3 per 1,000 population). This was considerably higher than any other statistical division, with the next highest rate recorded for Murray Lands (15.9), followed by Adelaide (15.5) and then Eyre (14.0). The lowest rate of 7.9 offences per 1,000 population was recorded for the Outer Adelaide Division.
- The highest rate of *serious criminal trespass* in 2003 was recorded by the Adelaide Statistical Division (27.2 offences per 1,000 dwellings). The Northern Division was second highest (19.0), with the rates in the other Divisions ranging between 7.8 and 15.7 offences per 1,000 dwellings).

Clearance status of offences recorded by police

- Of the 284,608 offences recorded by police during 2003, 124,657 (43.8%) were cleared by the end of that year, while conversely, 56.2% remained uncleared.
- However, the clear up level varied depending on the type of offence involved, with the lowest recorded for *property offences* (15.7% cleared by the end of 2003), followed by *robbery and extortion* (32.4% cleared). At the other end of the scale, over 99% of *driving offences* and *drug offences* were cleared – a

finding which is to be expected given that police normally detect these offences at the time of their commission by the perpetrator.

- In addition to the 124,657 offences which were both reported and cleared in 2003, a further 4,075 offences reported to police in earlier years were also cleared in 2003. This gives a total of 128,732 offences cleared over the twelve month period.
- Of these 128,732 offences cleared, the majority (89.6%) were cleared by way of the apprehension or cautioning of a suspect. A very small proportion of offences (1.1%) were designated as cleared on the grounds that they were unfounded, while 8.5% were cleared by the victim requesting that no further action be taken.
- However, the method of clearance varied depending on the type of offence involved. As expected, virtually all *driving* and *drug offences* were cleared by way of the apprehension of a suspect. In contrast, only 57.7% of *offences against the person* and 55.2% of *sexual offences* were cleared in this way. For these last two categories, the proportion cleared as a result of the victim requesting that no further action be taken was relatively high (39.7% in the case of *offences against the person* and 35.9% of *sexual offences*).

Victims of offences recorded by police

In this section, only offences which involved a 'personal' victim were counted. This included all *offences against the person*, all *sexual offences*, all *robberies* directed against an individual and all *larceny from the person* offences.

- In 2003 there were 22,308 recorded victimisations directed against a person.
- Of those 22,301 victimisations where the sex of the victim was recorded, just over one half (51.6%) involved males, while conversely, 48.4% involved females. This fairly even distribution of victims between males and females is in direct contrast to the male/female breakdown for alleged offenders, with males accounting for the majority of persons apprehended by police.
- Persons in the mid age ranges of 18 – 24 years and 25 – 34 years accounted for the highest proportion of personal victimisations recorded by police in 2003 (22.0% and 23.2% respectively), while the very young and the elderly accounted for relatively small proportions.
- However, the age profiles of victims varied depending on the type of offence involved. For *sexual offences*, for example, young people aged less than 18 years accounted for nearly half (45.5%) of all such victimisations recorded in 2003 while those aged 45 and over accounted for only 12.0%. In contrast, for *larceny from the person*, 34.2% of the victimisations recorded in 2003 involved victims aged 45 and over while only 9.6% were aged less than 18 years.

- Age profiles also varied depending on the sex of the victim. For *robbery and extortion* offences, the highest proportion of male victims fell within the 10-17 year age group, while the highest proportion of female victims were aged 25 to 34 years. Similarly, for *larceny from a person*, the highest proportion of male victims were relatively young. However, for female victims, one in four were aged 60 and over.
- The above information relates to the total number of offences involving a personal victim. However, the same victim may be subject to more than one offence and more than one incident during the course of the year. Another way of analysing the data, then, is to focus on the discrete number of victims who came to police attention in 2003. Over this twelve month period, 19,230 persons were victimised at least once. Almost nine in ten of these were victimised once only during the 12 month period, indicating that the level of repeat victimisation was low.

Offences cleared by way of an apprehension

- In 2003 115,172 offence charges were laid by police via apprehension reports. This figure was 3.2% lower than in 2002. More than eight in ten of these charges were laid against males.
- Of those charges laid in 2003 where the age of the alleged offender was recorded, relatively few involved older individuals, with persons aged 60 and over accounting for only 1.3% of the total. In contrast, over one half of all charges (59.9%) were laid against persons in the 18 – 34 year age bracket.
- Approximately one in seven charges laid in 2003 involved juveniles (aged 10 – 17 years inclusive). The level of juvenile involvement varied, however, according to the type of charge. To illustrate, this age group accounted for only 4.6% of *drug* charges but 39.0% of all *larceny/illegal use of a motor vehicle* charges.
- Of the 108,698 charges laid by police in 2003 where information on the racial appearance of the person was recorded, 12.2% involved persons of Aboriginal appearance. Again, however, this varied depending on the type of charge involved, with this group accounting for only 3.1% of all *drug offences* and 4.1% of all *fraud and misappropriation offences* cleared via apprehension, compared with 19.3% of all *serious criminal trespass* offences and 17.8% of all *damage property and environmental* charges.
- The 115,172 charges recorded in 2003 were contained in 59,063 separate apprehension reports. On average then, each apprehension report lodged by police during this twelve month period contained 1.95 charges. Over the same time period, a total of 37,942 discrete individuals were apprehended, giving an average of 1.56 apprehensions and 3.04 charges per person in 2003.

- Males accounted for the majority of apprehension reports lodged (80.6%) and the majority of discrete individuals apprehended during 2003 (79.0%).
- Persons of Aboriginal appearance constituted 13.3% of all apprehensions and 9.3% of all persons apprehended, where information on a persons racial appearance was recorded. Given that persons of Aboriginal descent constitute only 1.4% of the State's population aged 10 years and over, this indicates that their level of contact with the criminal justice system was considerably higher than expected on a per capita basis.
- Of the 37,942 discrete individuals apprehended in 2003, three quarters (74.2%) were apprehended only once during the 12 month period. However, there was a small group (925 or 2.4%) who were apprehended on six or more occasions, with 146 of these persons recording 11 or more apprehensions. Younger individuals were more likely to experience multiple apprehensions during the 12 month period than older persons. Similarly, a higher proportion of persons identified by police as Aboriginal were apprehended on more than one occasion in 2003 compared with non-Aboriginal persons (47.0% had two or more apprehensions compared with 26.6% of non-Aboriginal persons).
- In 2003, as in previous years, a small proportion of individuals were responsible for a high proportion of all charges laid during the twelve month period. In fact, 11.8% of persons apprehended in 2003 were responsible for 42.1% of all charges laid by police.