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**CRIME AND SAFETY IN
SOUTH AUSTRALIA:

KEY FINDINGS FROM
THE ABS 2000 SURVEY**

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In response to a submission by the Office of Crime Statistics, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) undertook a South Australian Crime and Safety survey in October 2000. Findings from the survey were published in the ABS report 'Crime and Safety, South Australia, October 2000' (catalogue no. 4509.4). This Information Bulletin presents a summary of the key findings from that report and compares the results from the 2000 survey with those from previous Crime and Safety surveys.

INTRODUCTION

In response to a submission by the Office of Crime Statistics, a South Australian Crime and Safety Survey was undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in October 2000 as part of its annual State Supplementary Survey program. The ABS and the South Australian Attorney General's Department jointly funded the survey. The purpose of the survey was to collect information about the extent of selected crimes in the community, whether or not these crimes were reported to the police and the characteristics of victims.

Findings from the survey were published in the ABS report *Crime and Safety, South Australia, October 2000*, released 30 March 2001 (catalogue no. 4509.4). This Information Bulletin presents a summary of the key findings and compares the results from the 2000 survey with those from previous Crime and Safety surveys.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The Crime and Safety survey was conducted by the ABS during the month of October 2000. A randomly selected sample of households and individuals were asked whether they have been victims of specific types of offending in the preceding 12 months.¹ Figures were then extrapolated to the South Australian population as a whole. However, because such extrapolations are estimates only and are subject to sampling error they should be interpreted with caution.

The crimes surveyed were:

Household

Break-in
Attempted break-in
Vehicle theft

Personal

Assault
Robbery

Questions on sexual assault were not included in the 2000 survey because responses from previous years indicated that the numbers were too small to produce reliable estimates. It should be noted that as sexual assault was not included in the most recent survey, victims of this type of offence might have chosen to report their victimisation under the general 'assault' category. It is not possible to determine whether (and to what extent) the omission of sexual assault effected the number of general assault victimisations captured by the survey.

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages of the Crime and Safety survey that should be remembered when considering the results. The advantages are that:

- it provides an alternative source of information to official crime statistics on levels of crime in the community;
- it counts all crimes that victims believe they have experienced, irrespective of whether or not these crimes have been reported to or recorded by police;

¹ Approximately 6,340 persons aged 15 years and over were surveyed, of whom 75.9% responded.

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- it provides important information on what proportion of offences are reported, the levels of re-victimisation and potential risk factors for victimisation; and
 - when compared with previous surveys, it allows longitudinal analysis to be conducted to determine changing trends in the level of victimisation. (The 2000 survey is the fifth in a series of such surveys conducted by the ABS, the others being in 1991, 1993, 1995 and 1998).² However, it should be noted that the questions in the 1998 and 2000 surveys, while comparable with each other, are slightly different to those included in previous surveys.

The limitations of the survey are that:

- it can only assess the prevalence and incidence of offences for which there has been a victim;
- the responses obtained are based on the respondent's perception of having been a victim of an offence. The term used for the offence, such as 'robbery' or 'assault' may not necessarily correspond with the legal or police definition of these offences;
- the responses are based on the recall of the respondents over the 12 months prior to the date of the survey. It is possible that respondents may not remember all incidents, or may not correctly recall the exact nature of an incident; and
- it is based on a population sample that is extrapolated to the population as a whole. The resulting figure is an estimate only, and may be subject to sampling error, particularly for offences that occur infrequently.

These methodological issues need to be remembered when interpreting the information presented in the following section.

KEY FINDINGS

The following section considers some of the key findings from the 2000 survey. For comparative purposes data from earlier surveys conducted by the ABS in 1991, 1993, 1995 and 1998 have been included. However, it should be noted that some of the questions included in the 1998 and 2000 surveys are slightly different from those of previous years. As the 2000 survey was conducted in South Australia only, no information is available from other Australian jurisdictions that would enable a comparison to be made between South Australia and other states.

Prevalence of victimisation

Household victimisation

During the 12 months to October 2000 an estimated 9.6% (n=59,000) of households in South Australia experienced at least one household crime (defined as a break-in, attempted break-in or vehicle theft). More specifically:

- 5.1% (n=31,600) experienced at least one break-in;
- 3.8% (n=23,300) experienced at least one attempted break-in; and
- 2.1% (n=12,900) experienced at least one vehicle theft.

² The 1991, 1993 and 1998 surveys were national. Like the 2000 survey, the 1995 survey was conducted in South Australia only.

Changes over time

As shown in Table 1, there was a decrease in the percentage of households victimised for break-in between 1991 and 1998 (from 6.9% to 4.0%). In 2000 the percentage of households victimised increased slightly in comparison to the 1998 level (to 5.1%). This figure was comparable with the percentage recorded in 1993, but lower than the 1991 figure.

Victimisation rates for attempted break-in declined between 1991 and 1993, stabilised in 1995 and then decreased again in 1998. In 2000 the figure was higher than that recorded in 1998, but lower than the peak recorded in 1991.

Data on vehicle theft were not recorded in 1991. The percentage of households experiencing at least one vehicle theft in 2000 was higher than reported in 1998, 1995 and 1993.

Table 1 Victimisation rates for break-in, attempted break-in and vehicle theft, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000

	% of households victimised				
	1991	1993	1995	1998	2000
Break-in	6.9	5.0	4.6	4.0	5.1
Attempted break-in	5.2	3.8	4.0	2.9	3.8
Vehicle theft	n.a.	1.7	1.1	1.2	2.1

Note: Comparisons between the 1998 and 2000 surveys and earlier surveys should be undertaken with caution given changes to the questions used in these later two surveys compared with previous ones.

The victimisation rates for break-in, attempted break-in and vehicle theft are presented graphically in Figures 1 to 3.

Figure 1 Victimisation rates for break-in, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000

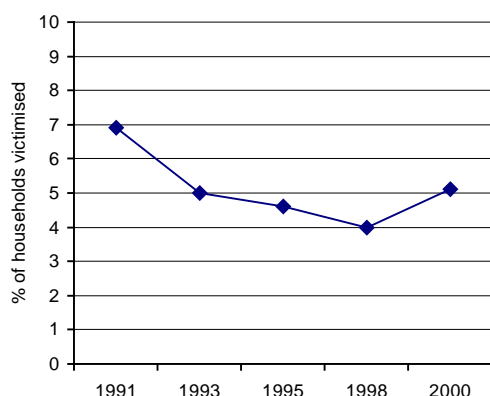


Figure 2 Victimisation rates for attempted break-in, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000

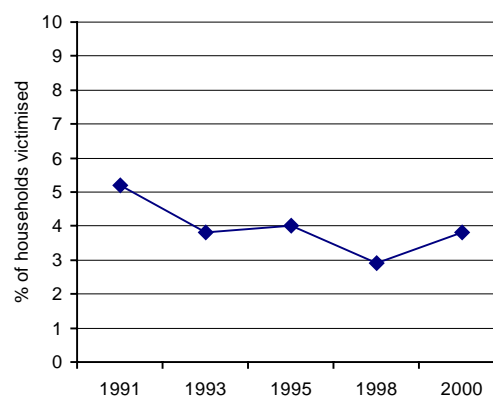
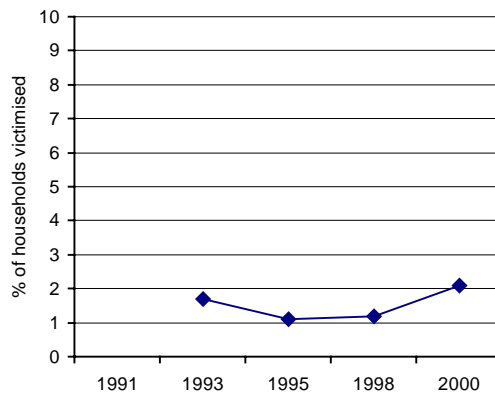


Figure 3 Victimisation rates for vehicle theft, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000*



* Data on vehicle theft were not recorded in 1991.

Dwelling characteristics

A higher victimisation rate was recorded for those who had lived in their current dwelling for less than three years compared with those who had lived at their current dwelling for longer periods. Households that were renting also had higher victimisation rates than those who owned or were purchasing their dwelling, with 6.5% of break-in victims and 5.6% of attempted break-in victims renting (compared with 4.8% and 3.2% respectively for those who owned/were purchasing). Victimization rates for household crime were also higher in the metropolitan area than the non-metropolitan area.

Personal victimisation

In the 12 months to October 2000 an estimated 5.0% of individuals in South Australia were the victims of at least one personal crime (defined as either a robbery or assault).³ This included:

- 0.7% (n= 8,200) of individuals who experienced at least one robbery; and
- 4.6% (n= 53,400) of individuals who experienced at least one assault.

Changes over time

Longitudinal data are presented in Table 2. Due to changes in the questions used in the 1998 and 2000 surveys comparisons between crimes recorded in these surveys and those recorded in earlier surveys are tenuous. However, the victimisation rates for robbery and assault recorded in the 2000 survey were slightly higher than in 1998. As noted earlier, the fact that sexual assault was excluded from the 2000 survey may have contributed to the relatively higher assault figure recorded, because victims who had been sexually assaulted may have chosen to report these incidents under the assault category.

³ Unlike previous surveys, the 2000 Crime and Safety survey did not include questions on sexual assault victimisation.

**Table 2 Victimisation rates for robbery, assault and sexual assault
1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000***

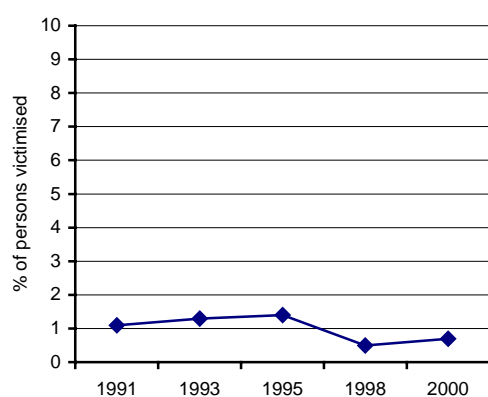
	% of persons victimised				
	1991	1993	1995	1998	2000
Robbery	1.1	1.3	1.4	0.5	0.7
Assault	2.9	2.5	2.6	4.2	4.6
Sexual assault**	0.3	0.8	n.a.	0.3	n.a.

* Comparisons between 1998 and 2000 surveys and earlier surveys should be undertaken with caution given changes to the questions used in these latter two surveys compared with previous ones.

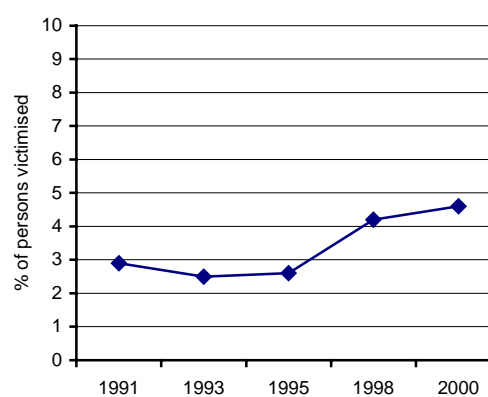
** The 2000 survey did not include questions on sexual assault. However, it is possible that respondents might report incidents of sexual assault under the general category of assault.

Victimisation rates for robbery and assault are presented graphically in Figures 4 and 5.

**Figure 4 Victimisation rates for robbery,
1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000**



**Figure 5 Victimisation rates for assault,
1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000**

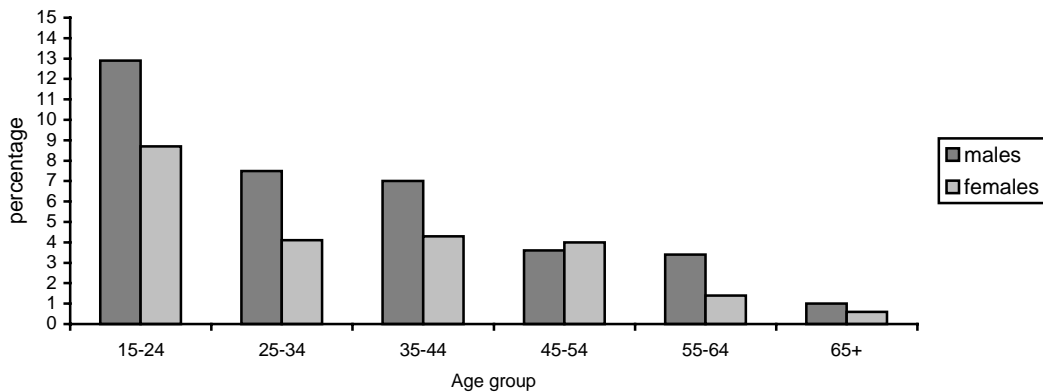


Victims of personal crime

The victimisation rate for personal crime (robbery and assault) was higher in the metropolitan area than the non-metropolitan area (5.4% compared with 3.9% respectively).

According to the 2000 survey, males were more likely to be victims of personal crime than females (6.2% compared with 3.9% respectively). The highest victimisation rate was amongst those aged 15-24 years (10.8%). Persons aged 65 years and over experienced the lowest victimisation rate (0.8%). Figure 6 shows the percentage of persons who reported a personal crime in the 2000 survey by age and sex.

Figure 6 Victims of personal crime by age and sex, 2000



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) *Crime and Safety, South Australia* (catalogue no. 4509.4)

The victimisation rate was higher amongst unemployed persons (13.0%) than those who were employed (5.5%) or not in the labour force (3.5%).

Relationship to offender – assault victims

Information on the relationship between the victim and offender was only available for the offence of assault. As Table 3 indicates, in the most recent incident 62.6% of assault victims knew the offender. The most common relationship between victims and offenders was that of a family member (21.4% of assault victims). A further 10.9% of assault victims identified the offender as a friend, while 10.3% knew the offender as an acquaintance.

Table 3 Victims of assault, whether the offender was known in the last incident, 2000

	Number '000	Proportion %
Offender known	33.4	62.6
Offender not known	20.0	37.4
Total assault victims	53.4	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) *Crime and Safety, South Australia* (catalogue no. 4509.4)

Revictimisation

Table 4 details the numbers of criminal incidents experienced by victims in the 12 months prior to the survey. Only data from 1995 and 2000 are presented because in 1991, 1993 and 1998 state breakdowns were unavailable. However, it should be noted that the 1995 and 2000 surveys are not directly comparable given changes to the questions used in the latest survey.

In 2000, 20.5% of victims of break-in and 33.6% of victims of attempted break-in experienced multiple offences. Of all reported victims of motor vehicle theft, 3.8% were victims of multiple offences. As Table 4 indicates, in 2000, 23.7% of robbery victims and 48.6% of assault victims were multiple victims. Revictimisation levels were higher in 2000 than in 1995 for break-in and attempted break-in, but lower for robbery and vehicle theft.

Table 4 Victims of crime: number of incidents experienced by type of offence, 1995 and 2000

	Break-in		Attempted break-in		% victimised Vehicle theft		Robbery		Assault	
	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000
	One	89.9	79.5	72.7	66.4	93.3	96.2	62.6	76.3	51.3
Two	8.4	13.4*	20.8	22.1	6.7	1.9**	21.3	17.7*	22.4	25.3
Three or more	1.7	7.0*	5.5	10.5	-	1.9**	14.1	5.9**	24.8	22.7

* Numbers very small and should be interpreted with caution.

** Numbers extremely small and estimates are not reliable.

Reporting rates

Survey respondents were asked whether they had reported the latest victimisation to the police. As the following section indicates, these rates vary considerably from one offence type to another.

Household victimisation

Overall, in the 12 months to October 2000:

- 78.8% reported the most recent break-in incident to the police;
- 33.8% reported the most recent attempted break-in victimisation to the police; and
- 90.8% reported the most recent motor vehicle theft to the police.

Changes over time

As shown in Table 5, reporting rates for break-in increased slightly between 1991 and 1993, with little change between 1993 and 1995 and a slight decline between 1995 and 1998. In 2000 there was a marginal decrease in reporting rates in comparison to 1998 (to 78.8%).

Attempted break-in reporting rates showed a decrease between 1991 and 1993, little change between 1993 and 1995 and a marginal decrease between 1995 and 1998. In 2000 there was a slight increase in reporting rates to 33.8%.

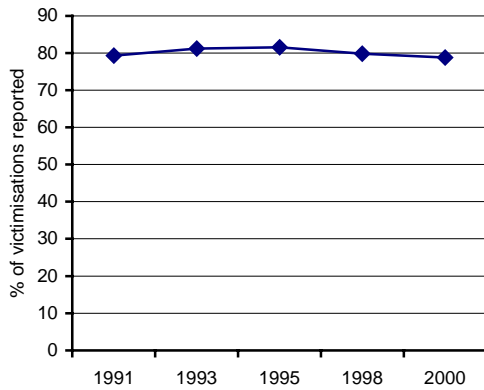
Data on reporting rates for vehicle theft were not recorded in 1991. The percentage of vehicle thefts reported rose between 1993 and 1995 but decreased slightly between 1995 and 1998. In 2000 there was a further decrease to 90.8%.

**Table 5 Reporting rates for break-in, attempted break-in and vehicle theft
1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000**

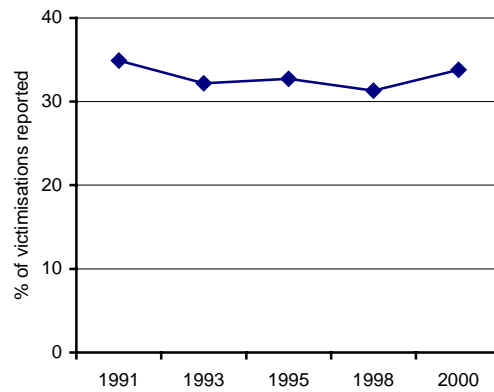
	% of victimisations reported				
	1991	1993	1995	1998	2000
Break-in	79.3	81.2	81.5	79.8	78.8
Attempted break-in	34.9	32.2	32.7	31.3	33.8
Vehicle theft	n.a.	89.6	96.8	94.4	90.8

Reporting rates for break-in, attempted break-in and vehicle theft are presented graphically in Figures 7, 8 and 9.

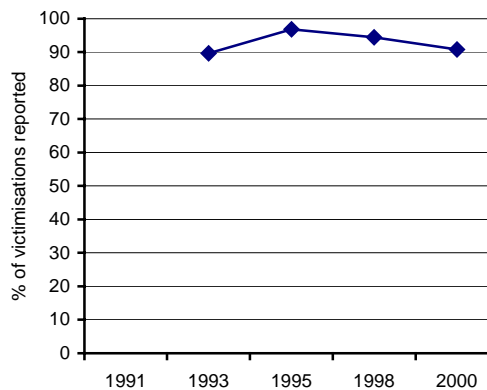
**Figure 7 Reporting rates for break-in,
1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000**



**Figure 8 Reporting rates for attempted
break-in, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000**



**Figure 9 Reporting rates for vehicle
theft, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000***



* Data on reporting rates for vehicle theft were not recorded in 1991.

Personal victimisation

Overall, compared with household victimisations (break-in, attempted break-in and vehicle theft), a lower proportion of personal victimisations (robbery and assault) were reported to police.⁴ In the 12 month period to October 2000:

- 54.8% of the most recent robbery incidents were reported to police; and
- 27.3% of the most recent assault incidents were reported to police.

Changes over time

Table 6 shows reporting rates for personal victimisations from 1991 to 2000. As shown, between 1993 and 1998 there was a considerable decline in the number of robbery victimisations reported (from 66.8% to 42.5%). However, in 2000 this trend was reversed, with an increase in reporting rates to 54.8%.

Assault victimisation reporting increased from 31.2% in 1991 to 38.5% in 1995, before declining to 30.2% in 1998. In 2000 the rate declined further to 27.3%.

Table 6 Reporting rates for robbery and assault, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000*

	% of victimisations reported				
	1991	1993	1995	1998	2000
Robbery	66.0	66.8	54.0	41.8	54.8
Assault	31.2	31.5	38.5	30.7	27.3

* Sexual assault figures are excluded from this table because reporting rates for sexual assault were unavailable in 1991, 1993, 1998 and 2000.

The reporting rates for robbery are presented graphically in Figure 10. The reporting rates for assault are presented in Figure 11.

⁴ As the 2000 survey did not include any questions relating to sexual assault reporting rates these data are unavailable.

Figure 10 Reporting rates for robbery, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000

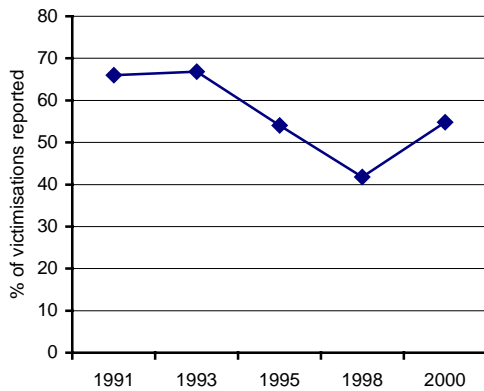
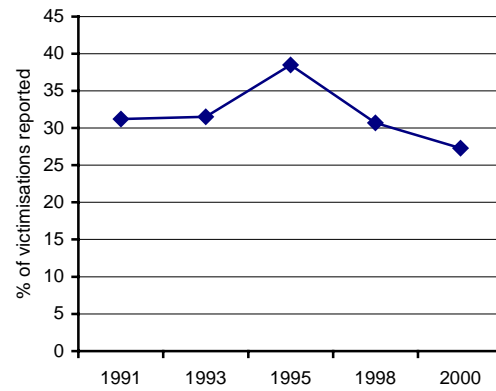


Figure 11 Reporting rates for assault, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000



Reasons for not reporting the most recent break-in

Reasons for not reporting crime experiences were not presented in the ABS report for all offences. According to the 2000 survey, the main reasons cited for not reporting the most recent break-in incident to police were that:

- I thought there was nothing the police could do;
- Too trivial/unimportant; and
- I thought the police would have been unwilling to do anything.

Implications of reporting rates

Reporting rates have important implications for the accuracy of police data. In 2000, according to the Crime and Safety survey, incidents *not reported to police* included 6,700 break-ins, 15,400 attempted break-ins, 3,700 robberies, and 38,800 assaults. Only 1,200 motor vehicle thefts (approximately 10%) were not reported to the police. Thus, while police generated statistics on vehicle thefts are likely to be highly accurate, they will underestimate the number of attempted housebreaks and general assaults experienced by the community.

Perceived problems in the neighbourhood

According to the 2000 survey, 56.9% of respondents perceived that there were problems with crime or nuisance behaviour in their neighbourhood. As Table 7 indicates, the problems most commonly identified were:

- Housebreakings/burglaries/theft from home (38.3%);
- Dangerous/noisy driving (35.5%); and
- Vandalism/Graffiti/Damage to property (34.7%).

Table 7 Survey respondents perceptions of crime or public nuisance problems in the neighbourhood, 2000

	'000	%
Perceived problems		
Housebreakings/burglaries/theft from home	447.7	38.3
Dangerous/noisy driving	415.4	35.5
Vandalism/graffiti/damage to property	406.2	34.7
Car theft	317.3	27.1
Louts/youth gangs	240.5	20.6
Other theft	173.6	14.8
Illegal drugs	156.8	13.4
Drunkenness	132.7	11.4
Prowlers/loiterers	108.0	9.2
Problems with neighbours/domestic problems	86.9	7.4
Other assault	57.0	4.9
Sexual assault	30.2	2.6
Other	16.6	1.4
No perceived problems	503.7	43.1
Total	1169.2	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) *Crime and Safety, South Australia* (catalogue no. 4509.4)

The types of crime or nuisance behaviour perceived to be the greatest problem in the neighbourhood was relatively similar for males and females. No problems with crime or public nuisance behaviour were identified by 42.9% of males and 43.3% of females.

CONCLUSION

This Information Bulletin considers the findings from the 2000 Crime and Safety survey in comparison with previous surveys. While, the results of these surveys are not directly comparable with recorded crime figures, the increased victimisation rates found in the 2000 survey are consistent with increases in recorded crime since 1998.