

Reported Crime Trends in South Australia.

This Bulletin aims to contribute to a better understanding of crime and crime trends in South Australia by providing statistics on all offences reported or becoming known to police in South Australia.

The first section contains information on the number and type of offences reported to police in the 1995 calendar year.

The second section looks at longitudinal trends in selected offence categories.

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INTRODUCTION

The incidence and nature of crime is a topic of particular concern to all communities because it impacts on people's sense of security and perceptions of personal safety. The media, in particular, often raise questions about whether crime is on the increase or whether offending is becoming more serious. However, to ensure that informed debate on these important issues can take place, access to the most accurate statistical information currently available is crucial. The aim of this Bulletin is to contribute to a better understanding of crime and crime trends in South Australia by providing statistics on all offences reported or becoming known to police in this state.

The bulletin is divided into two sections:

- section one contains information relating to the 1995 calendar year
- section two looks at longitudinal trends in selected offence categories.

Data contained in this report are derived from the more extensive report entitled "Crime and Justice in South Australia, 1995", released by the Office of Crime Statistics in 1996.

UNDERSTANDING HOW CRIME IS MEASURED

There is no way to measure accurately the true extent of crime within the community. Two sources of information are regularly used, but both have limitations. One is based on victimisation surveys and the other on official statistics recorded by the key criminal justice agencies.

This bulletin will focus on one type of official crime statistic; namely those offences reported or becoming known to police. Before a particular offence is included in these police statistics a number of steps must occur:

- first, an incident must take place and that incident must be perceived as criminal either by the victim or a witness;
- second, the victim (or witness) must then report that offence to police; and
- third, police must decide whether it is in fact a criminal matter and, if so, whether to record it.

Because these steps must take place before a matter is officially recorded by police, the resultant statistics do not measure all crime that occurs. A criminal incident may not be recognized as such by the victim. Alternatively victims may choose not to report an offence to police. Hence such incidents will not be counted in the official statistics. Despite these limitations, the number of offences reported or becoming known to police represents one of the key measures used to monitor crime trends.

UNDERSTANDING HOW CRIME IS MEASURED CONT.

The other key source of information is that of victimisation surveys. The Australian Bureau of Statistics regularly conducts interviews with a randomly selected number of households and individuals and asks them whether they have been the victim of a particular offence during the past twelve months. The findings are then extrapolated to the population as a whole. The advantage of victimisation surveys is that they do not rely on people actually reporting a matter to police and so provide a measure of all crime - both reported and unreported. However, they do have their own limitations. For example, victimless crimes (such as drug offences) or crimes which do not have a personal victim (such as corporate crime and crimes against business) cannot be included. In addition victims may be unable to accurately recall information relating to the previous twelve months. And the results obtained may not be directly comparable with official statistics. For example, what a victim considers to be a robbery may not be defined as such by police, who are required to adhere to the strict legal definition of the term. Nevertheless, in combination, victimisation surveys and official crime statistics provide a useful profile of offending behavior.

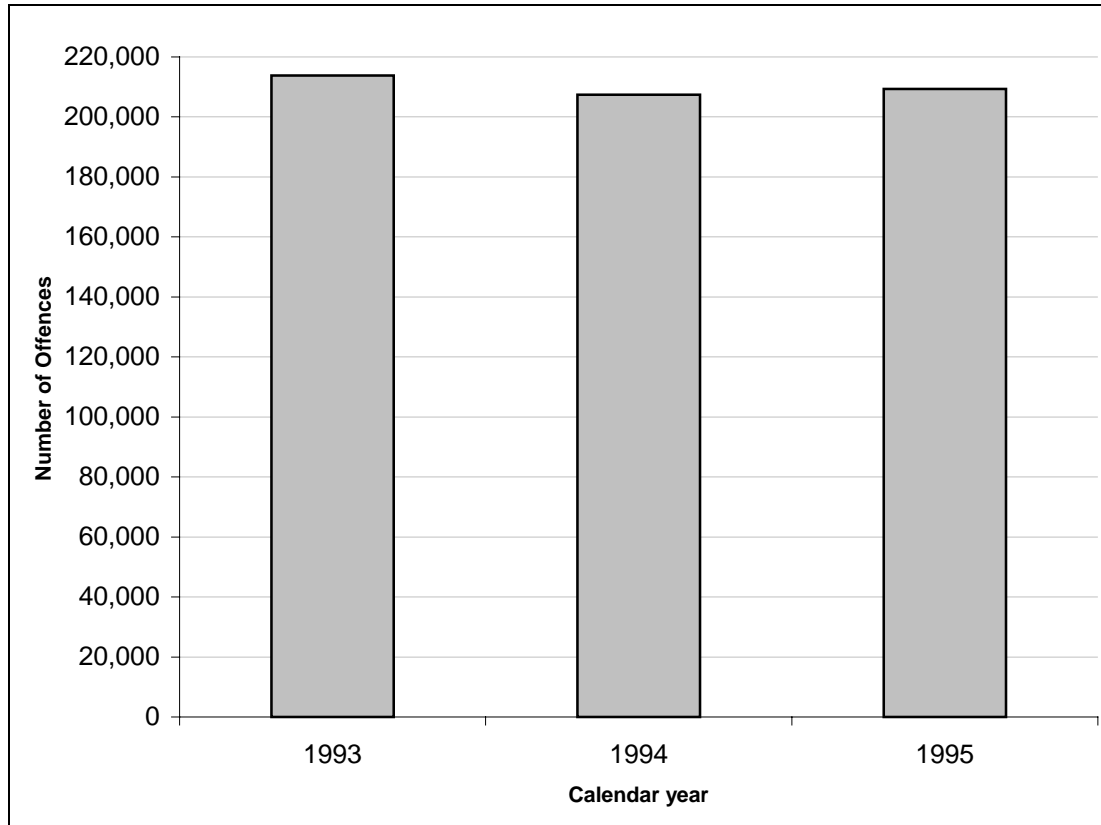
For the purposes of this bulletin, however, only offences officially reported or coming to police notice will be considered. In South Australia, when a victim reports a crime, operational police fill in an Incident Report. It is from these reports that the following statistics are derived. The counting rules used to determine the number of offences reported are best explained by providing specific examples.

- If a victim reports one incident of assault, one offence (assault) is recorded
- If a victim reports one incident which involves an assault and larceny from the person, two offences are recorded - one assault and one larceny.
- If one victim reports two incidents of assault, which were committed at separate times two offences are recorded.
- The exception to these counting practices is sexual offences. If the one victim is the subject of more than one indecent assault, and the assaults occurred on separate occasions and were committed by the same offender, it is recorded only once. This counting rule is in line with the national counting rules established by the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Crime Statistics Unit.

For more information about offence classifications and counting rules please refer to “Crime and Justice in South Australia, 1995” (Office of Crime Statistics).

TOTAL OFFENCES REPORTED OR BECOMING KNOWN TO POLICE

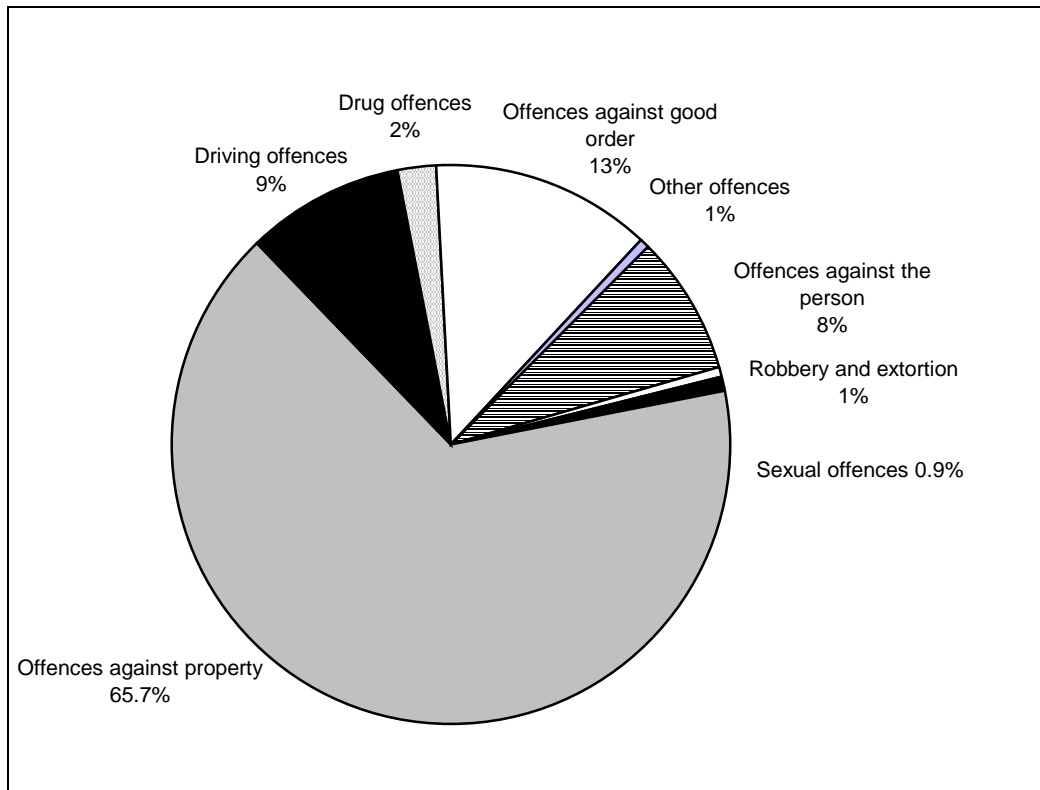
Figure 1: Number of offences reported or becoming known to police



- In 1995, 209,361 crimes were reported or became known to police.
- As shown in Figure 1, this represented a slight increase (of 0.9%) compared with 1994, when 207,392 crimes were reported. But it represents a decrease of 2.1% from 1993 when 213,830 offences were recorded.
- Comparison with pre-1993 data is not possible because of changes to the way in which offences are counted.

TYPE OF OFFENCES REPORTED TO POLICE

Figure 2: Types of Offences Reported, 1995

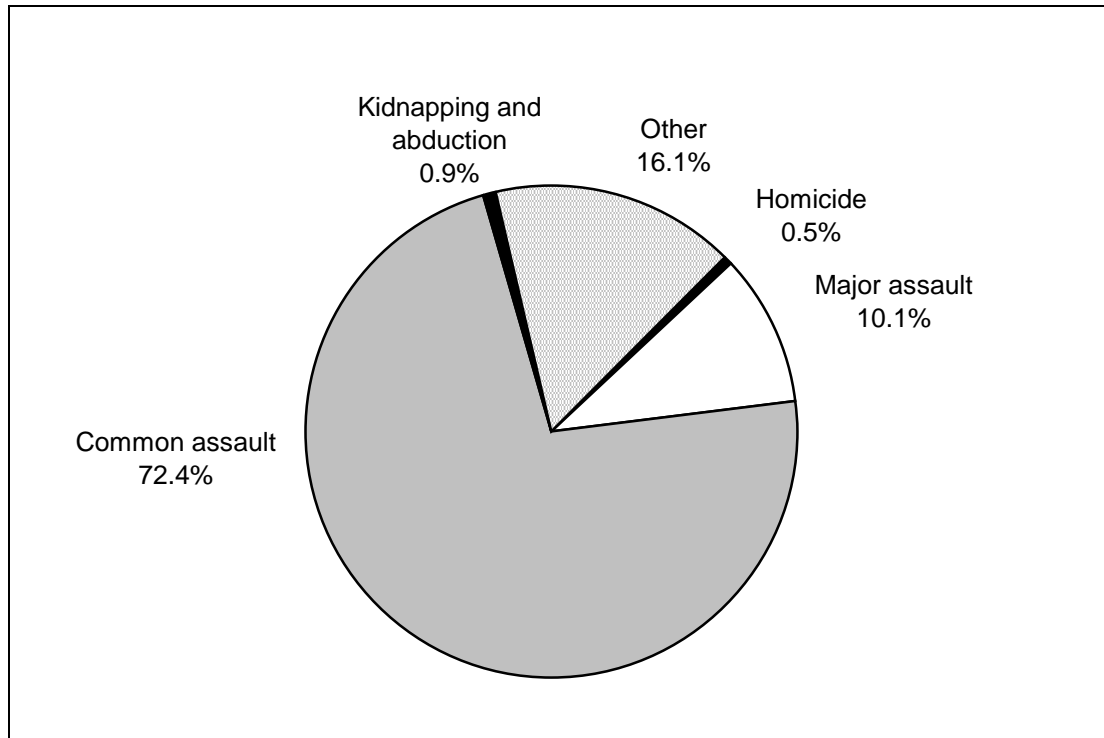


- In 1995, offences against property accounted for almost two thirds (65.7%) of all offences reported or becoming known to police.
- By contrast, offences against the person (exc. sexual assault) accounted for 8.0%, while sexual offences accounted for less than 1.0%.
- Of the remainder:
 - offences against good order accounted for 12.8%;
 - driving offences for 9.3%;
 - drug offences for 2.1%; and
 - robbery and extortion for 0.7%.

A more detailed breakdown of each offence category is provided in the following pages.

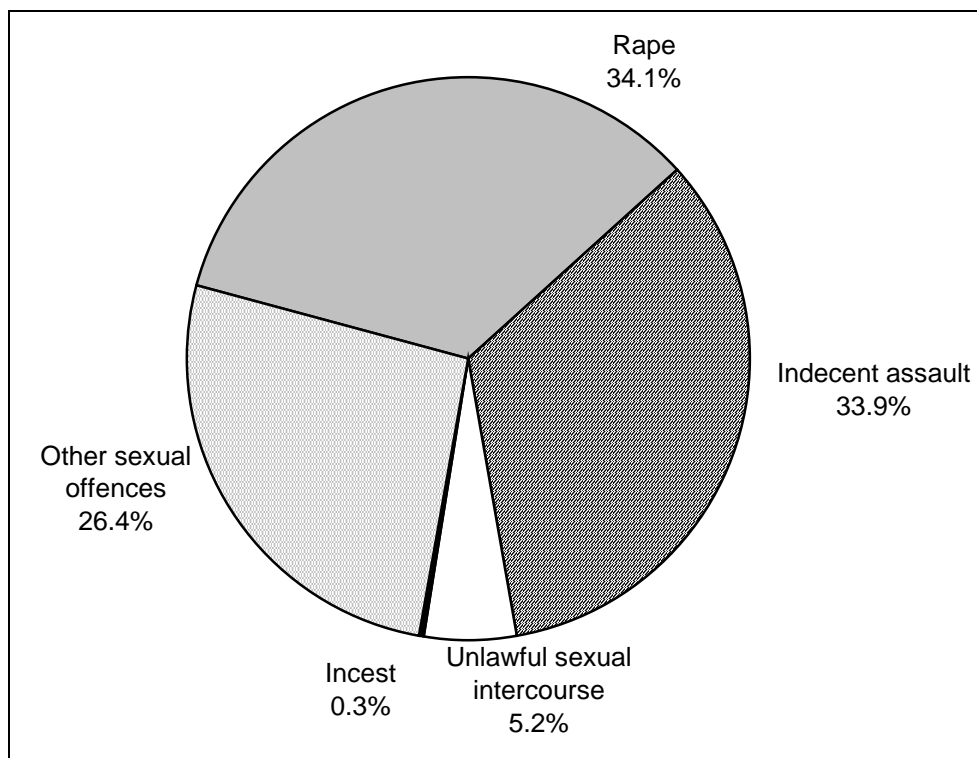
Offences Against the Person, Excluding Sexual Offences

Figure 3: Types of Offences Against the Person, 1995



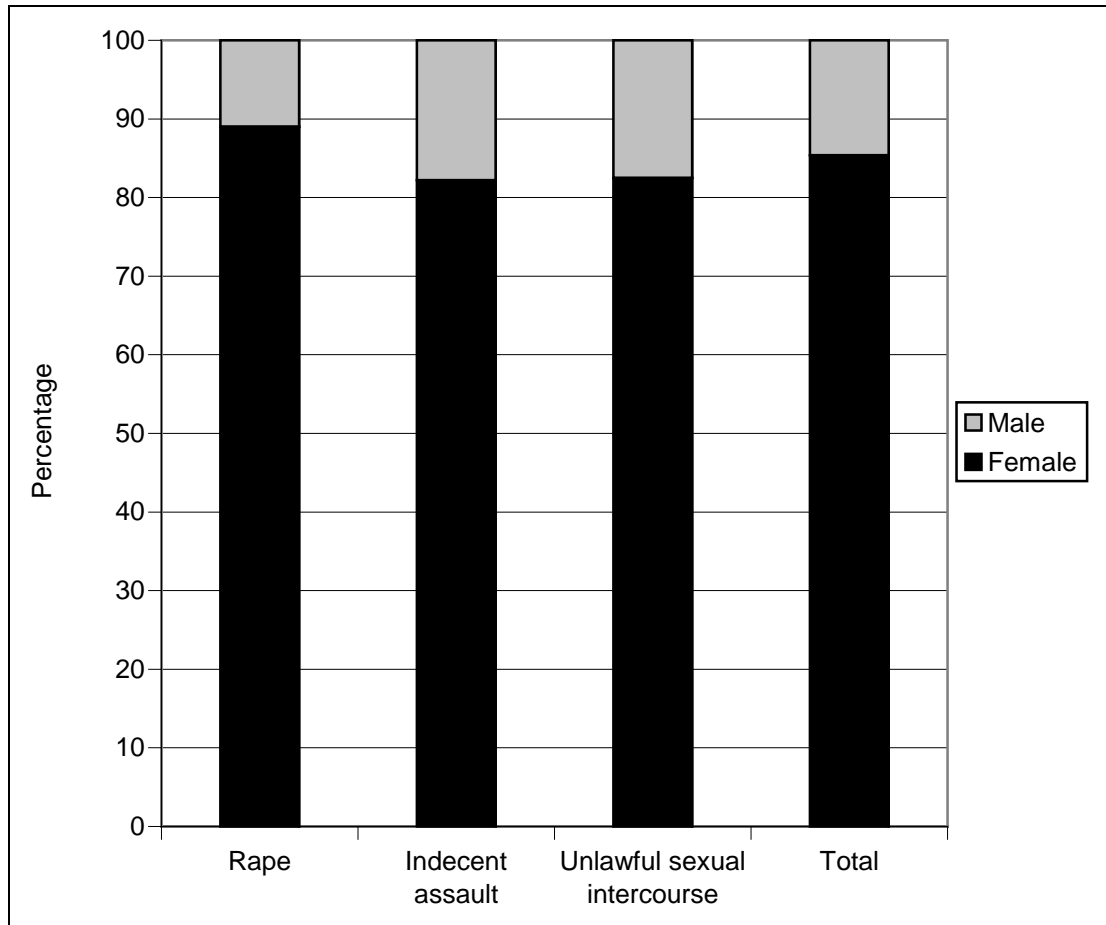
- In 1995, 16,674 offences against the person (excluding sexual offences) were reported or became known to police.
- The majority of these (72.4%) involved common assault, which is considered to be one of the less serious offences within this group.
- By contrast, major assault (including such crimes as assault occasioning grievous bodily harm and assault occasioning actual bodily harm) accounted for 10.1%.
- In 1995, 82 homicide offences were reported in South Australia. This figure consisted of 22 murders, 40 attempted murders, 1 manslaughter and 19 reports of causing death by dangerous driving. Homicide offences represented 0.5% of all offences against the person and 0.04% of all offences brought to police notice.
- Of the other offences in this category:
 - kidnapping and abduction accounted for 0.9%;
 - manslaughter/drive causing death 0.1%; and
 - conspiracy to murder 0.02%.

Figure 4: Types of Sexual Assault Reported to Police, 1995



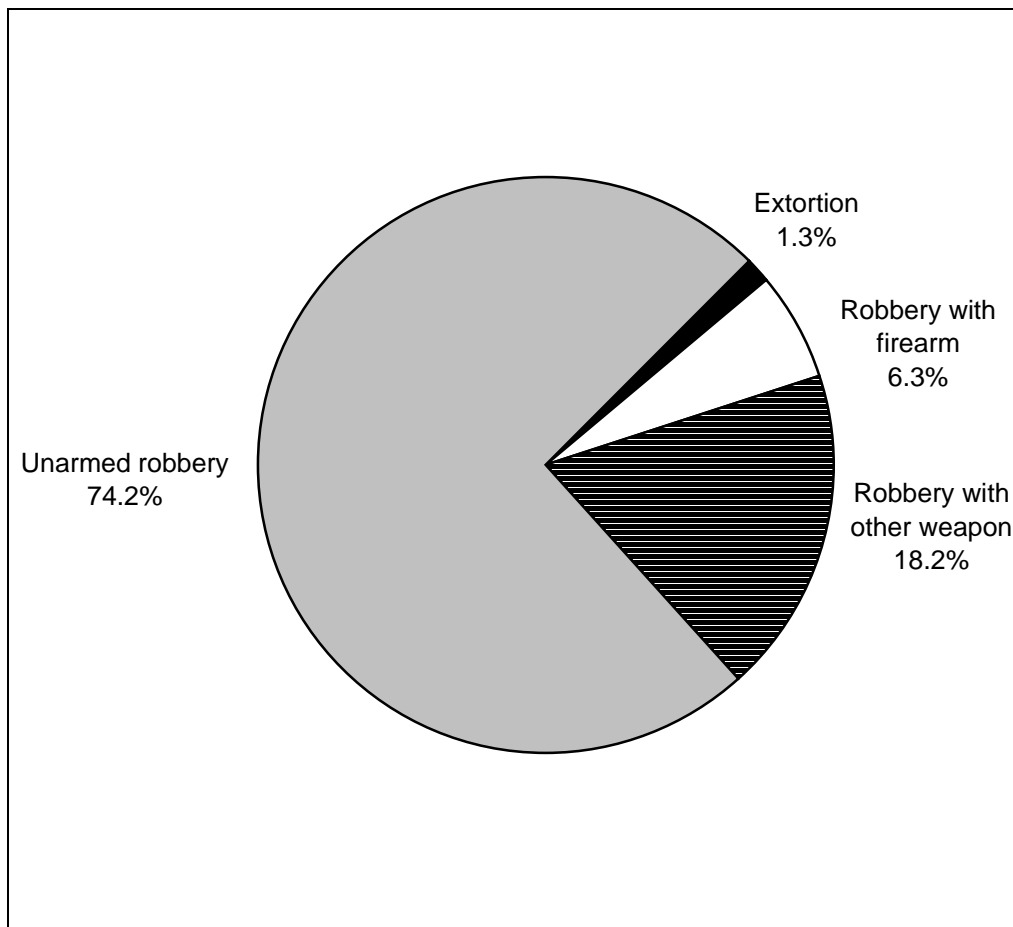
- In 1995, there were 1,850 sexual offences which were reported or became known to police. This represents a rate of 125.4 per 100,000 population.
- Sexual offences accounted for only 0.9% of all offences reported.
- However, some care should be used when interpreting these figures because of the large number of sexual assaults which are never reported to police. According to a Crime and Safety survey conducted in South Australia in 1995 (ABS 4509.7) only one quarter of female sexual assault victims aged 18 and over reported the last incident to police. A more recent national survey put the figure for Australia even lower, at approximately 15%. (Women's Safety Survey, 1996, ABS 4510.0).
- As shown in Figure 4, of the 1,850 sexual offences reported to police in SA in 1995,
 - rape accounted for 34.1%;
 - indecent assault for 33.9%;
 - unlawful sexual intercourse for 5.2%;
 - incest for 0.3%; and
 - other sexual offences for 26.4%.

Figure 5: Gender of Victims of Reported Sexual Assaults, 1995



- As shown in Figure 5, most of the victims of reported sexual assaults were females. They accounted for 85.4% of all offences within this category, although this varied slightly from 82.2% for indecent assaults to 89.0% for rape.
- To a large extent this gender bias reflects the fact that males are the main perpetrators of sexual assault. However, it may also be partly due to a greater reluctance amongst males to report incidents of victimisation to police. While overall reporting levels for sexual assault are extremely low, considerable effort has been invested in providing support services for women victims and in encouraging them to contact police. In contrast, sexual assault against males receives far less attention, thereby potentially reducing a male's willingness to report.

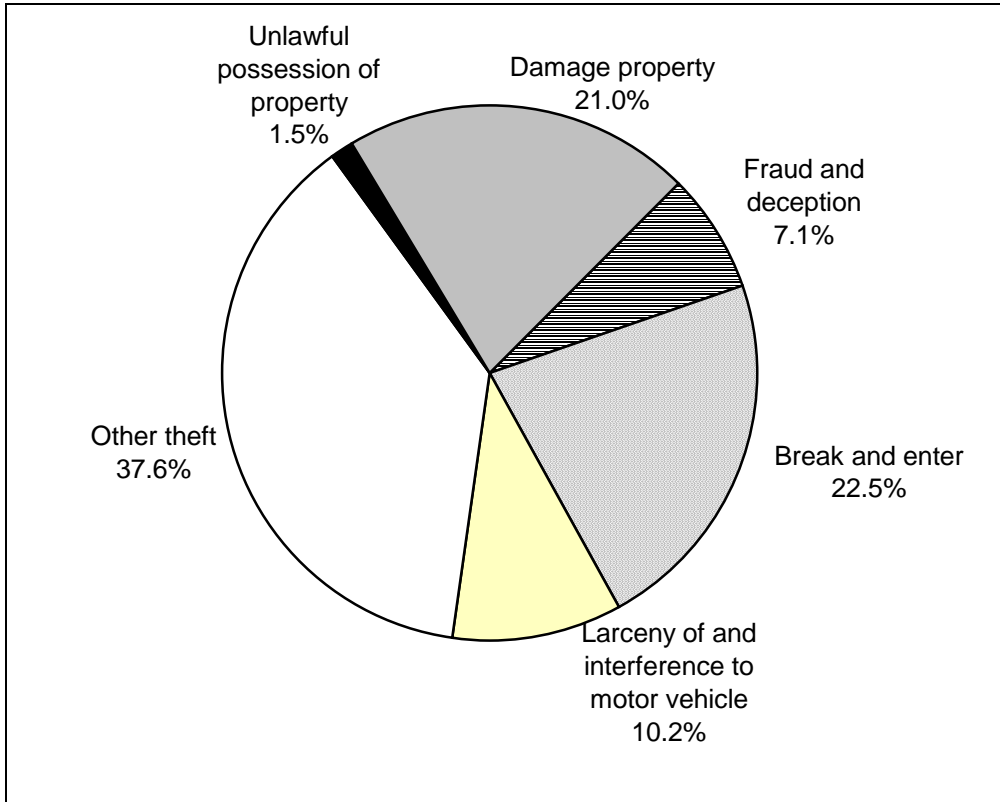
Figure 6: Types of robbery and extortion offences



- In 1995, there were 1,491 offences of robbery and extortion which were reported to or became known to police.
- As shown in Figure 6, unarmed robbery accounted for the overwhelming majority of offences in this category (74.2%), while extortion accounted for only 1.3%. The remainder (24.5%) were armed robberies.
- Of the 366 armed robberies reported in 1995, one quarter (25.7%) involved the use of a firearm while in the remaining 74.3%, another type of weapon was used.

Property Offences

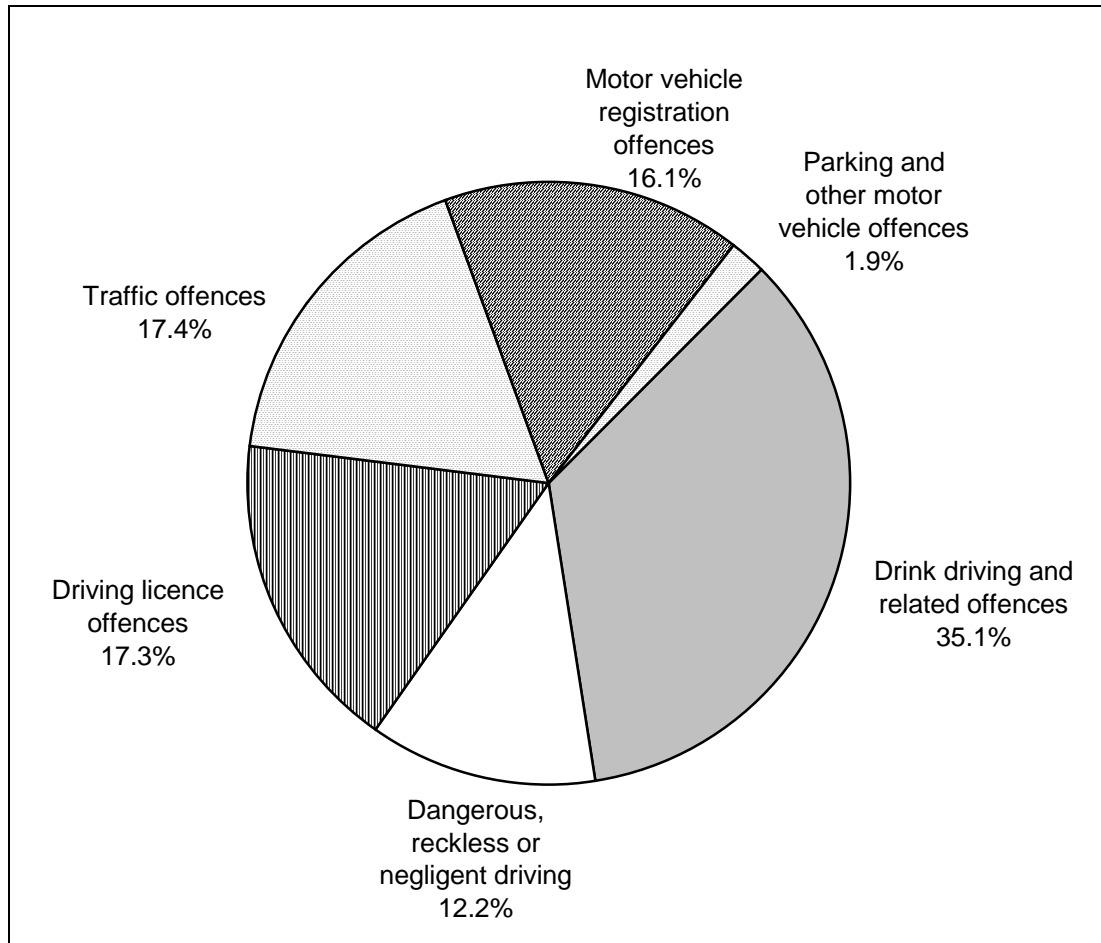
Figure 7: Types of property offences



- In 1995, there were 137,579 offences against property reported or brought to police attention.
- Of these, the majority (37.6%) involved 'other' theft. This includes crimes such as shop theft and steal from the person.
- This was followed by:
 - break and enter, which accounted for 22.5%;
 - damage property, which accounted for 21.0%;
 - larceny of and interference to a motor vehicle, which accounted for 10.2%;
 - fraud and deception, which accounted for 7.1%; and
 - unlawful possession of property, which accounted for 1.5%.

Driving Offences

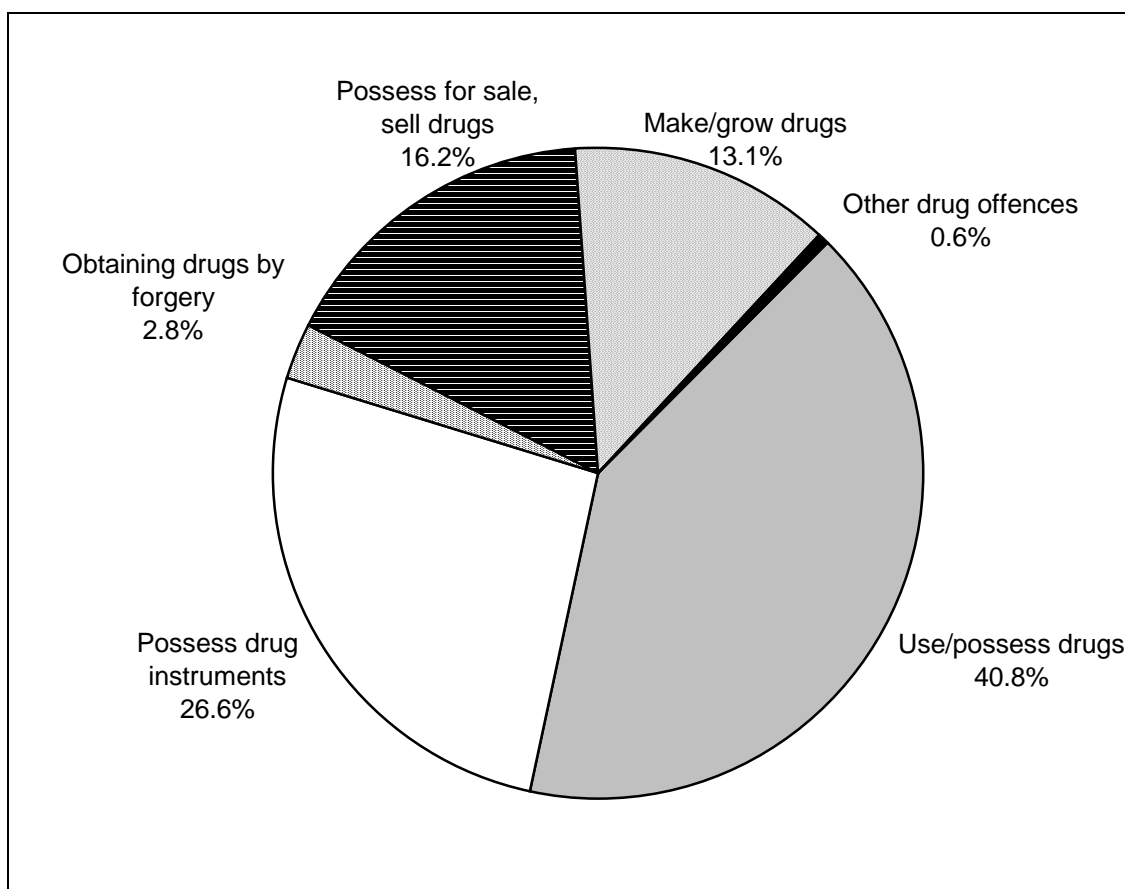
Figure 8: Types of driving offences



- In 1995, there were 19,488 driving offences reported or brought to police attention. (Note: these figures do not include traffic infringement notices).
- Of these, the majority (35.1%) involved drink driving and related offences.
- This was followed by:
 - Traffic offences - 17.4%;
 - Driving licence offences - 17.3%;
 - Motor vehicle registration offences - 16.1%;
 - Dangerous, reckless or negligent driving -12.2%; and
 - Parking and other motor vehicle offences -1.9%.

Drug Offences

Figure 9: Types of drug offences



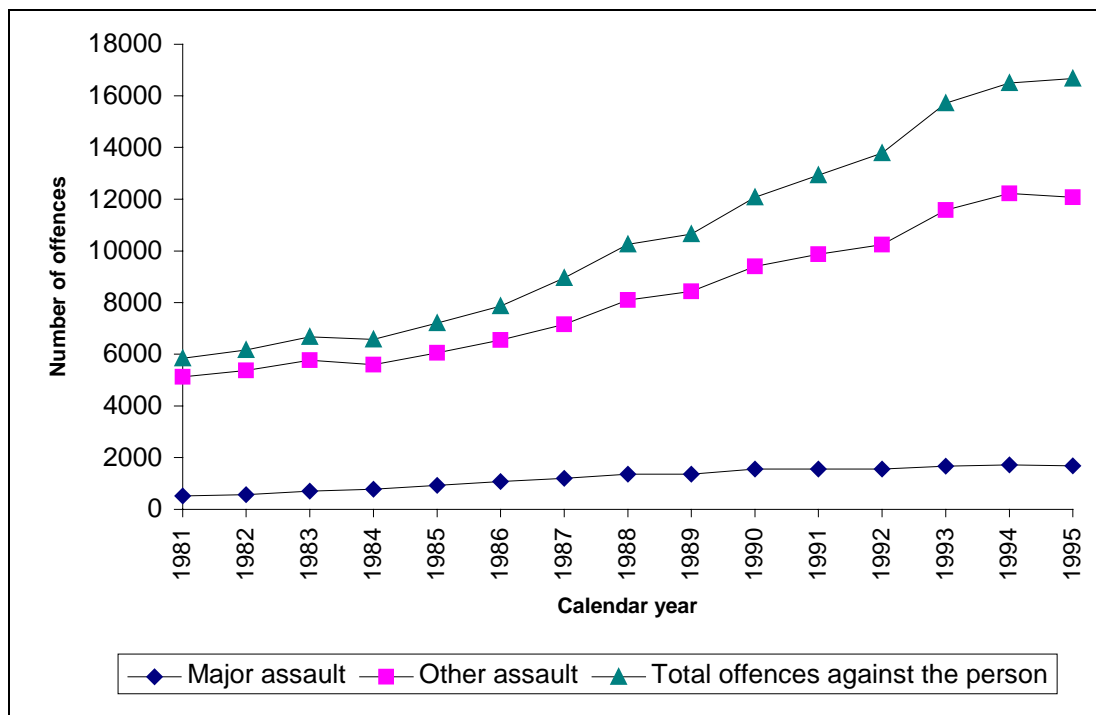
- In 1995, there were 4,346 drug offences reported or brought to police attention. (These figures do not include offences which were the subject of a Cannabis Expiation Notice. These notices, which involve an on the spot fine for using or possessing small amounts of cannabis, were introduced on 30 April 1987).
- Of all drug offences recorded, the majority (40.8%) involved the use or possession of drugs.
- This was followed by:
 - possess drug instruments - 26.6%;
 - possess for sale, sell drugs - 16.2%;
 - make/grow drugs - 13.1%;
 - obtaining drug by forgery - 2.8%; and
 - other drug offences - 0.6%.

LONGITUDINAL TRENDS

The information presented so far relates to offences reported or becoming known to police in 1995. However, this does not provide any indication of whether the incidence of particular offences is increasing or decreasing over time. To provide an indication of longitudinal trends in crimes reported to police, the ensuing sections include data from 1981 to 1995.

Offences Against the Person (excluding sexual offences)

Figure 10: Total offences against the person (excluding sexual assault)



- As shown in Figure 10, total offences against the person have increased steadily since the early 1980s.
- However, the rate of increase now seems to be leveling off. From 1994 to 1995, there was only a marginal increase of 1.0% which was mainly due to a large increase in 'other' personal offences.
- In several key areas, the number of reported offences actually decreased between 1994 and 1995. In particular:
 - major assaults, which have increased gradually since the early 1980s, decreased by 2.0%, which is the first decrease recorded in six years.
 - other (i.e. minor assaults) also decreased (albeit marginally) between 1994 and 1995. This is the first decrease recorded in eleven years.

Homicide

- The small numbers of homicide offences which occur in South Australia cause figures to fluctuate markedly from one year to another, making the identification of longitudinal trends difficult. This is particularly true for manslaughter offences.
- Figure 11 depicts the number of murders reported per year from 1981 to 1995. As shown, there does seem to have been an upward trend during this period, with intermittent peaks recorded in 1982, 1991 and 1993. In 1995 the number of murders reported to police was considerably lower than in 1994 (down by 15.4%), but higher than for much of the period between 1983 and 1990.
- Similarly, despite annual fluctuations, the number of attempted murders does seem to be increasing. The figure of 40 recorded in 1995 was 122% higher than the number brought to police attention in 1981. However, because this offence requires police to assess the intent behind the illegal action, interpretation can vary considerably. Hence attempted murder figures are particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in police charging practices.
- By contrast, no discernible trend is evident in relation to the offence of driving causing death. In fact, the numbers recorded in the 1993 to 1995 period are lower than, or comparable with, the number recorded in 1981.

Figure 11: Homicide Trends

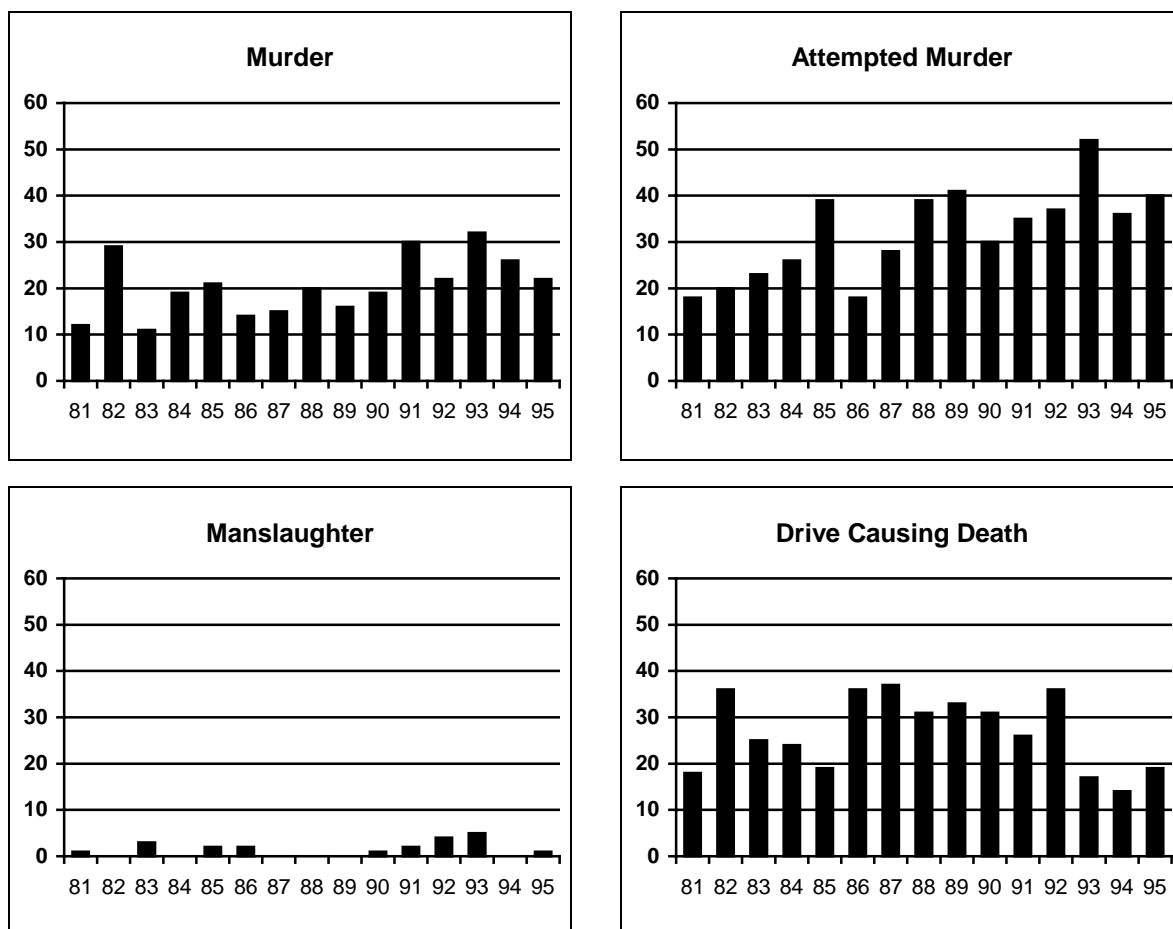
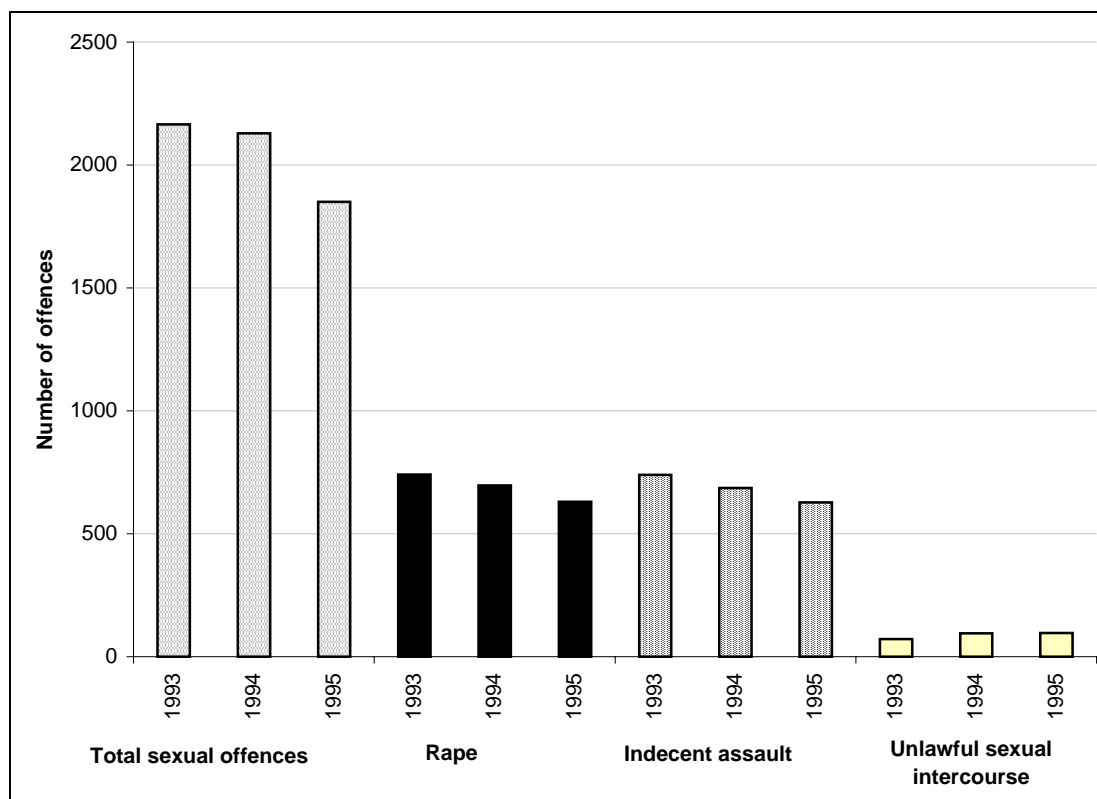


Figure 12: Trends in sexual offences, 1993 to 1995

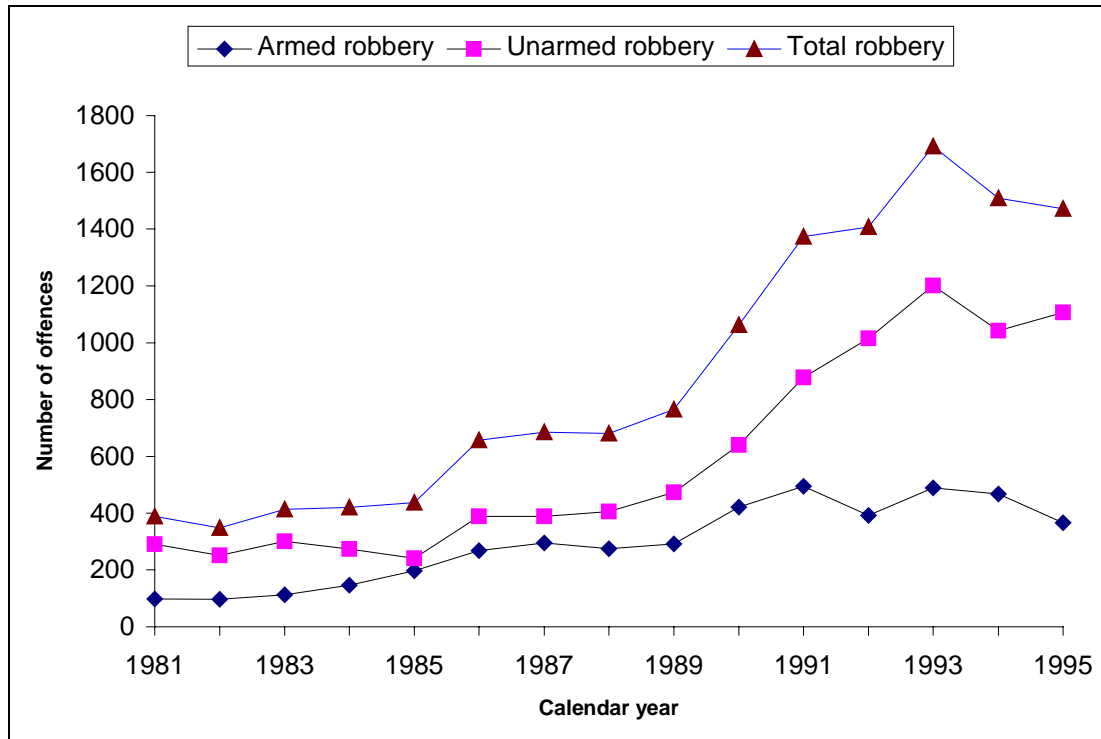


The counting rules used to calculate the number of sexual offences reported to South Australian police changed in 1993 to bring them into line with the National Counting Rules established by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Until this time, if a victim reported to police that he/she had been sexually assaulted 20 times in the past 5 years, all 20 incidents were counted. However, under the new system, if the one victim reports multiple offences to police, involving the same offender and if those incidents are all recorded on the one incident report, then only one offence is recorded.

Because of this change in counting rules, longitudinal comparisons can only be made from 1993 onwards.

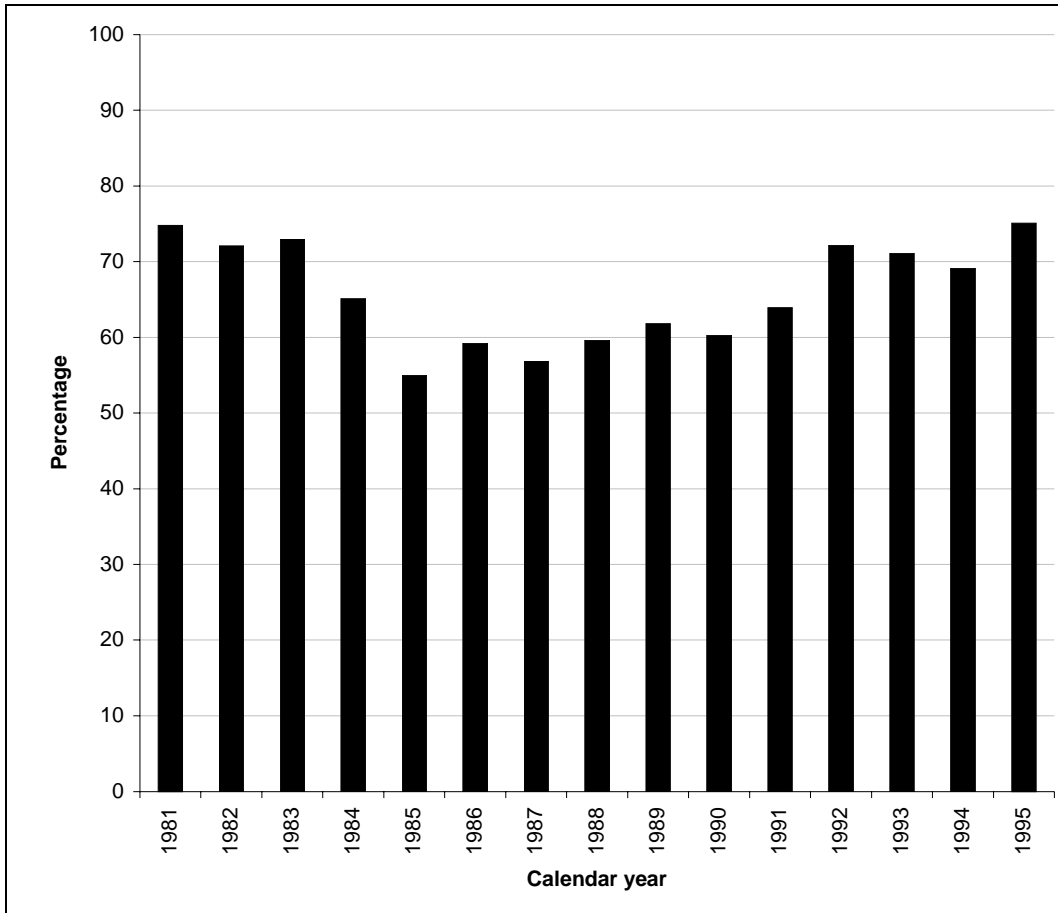
- The total number of sexual offences reported to police has decreased during the three years depicted. The 1995 figure of 1,850 was 13.1% lower than that recorded in 1994 and 14.6% lower than in 1993. This included
 - a 15.0% decrease in rapes during the 1993 to 1995 period; and
 - a 15.0% decrease in indecent assaults.
- The number of offences involving unlawful sexual intercourse is too small to draw any conclusions about longitudinal trends.

Figure 13: Trends in robbery offences



- As shown in Figure 13, the number of robbery matters reported to police increased markedly from 1989 to 1993. However, during the past two years, figures have decreased, from 1,691 in 1993 to 1,509 in 1994 to 1,472 in 1995. This represents the first period of decrease since the early 1980s.
- There are distinct differences in trends between the two main categories of armed and unarmed robbery. While numbers in both categories increased slightly during the 1980s, in the final year of that decade, unarmed robberies began to climb dramatically and continued to do so until 1994 when a 13.3% decrease was recorded. This was the first decrease in nine years. And although the figures went up again slightly in 1995, they were still lower than the peak recorded in 1993.
- In contrast, while armed robberies also increased during the 1980s, numbers peaked earlier and at a much lower level than did unarmed robberies. And they are now declining. In fact, 1995 figures were the lowest recorded since 1989.

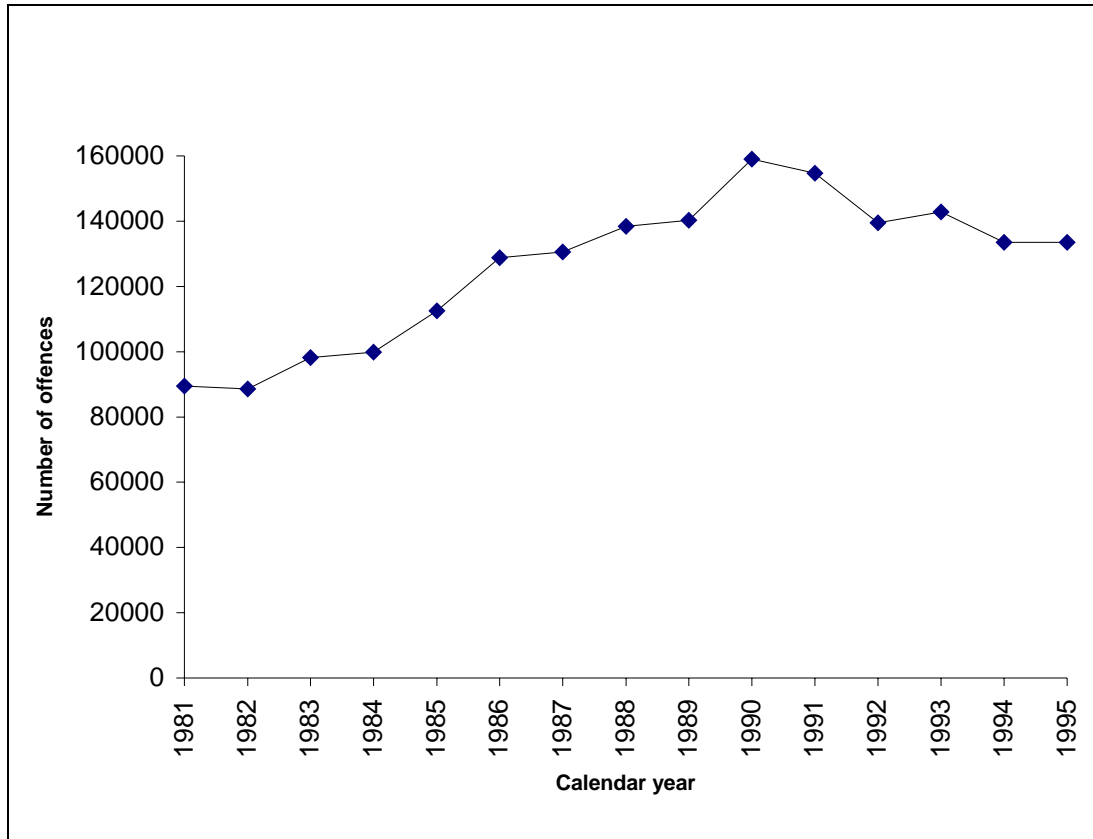
Figure 14: Unarmed robbery as a percentage of all robberies



- In 1981, unarmed robberies accounted for three quarters (74.5%) of all robberies reported to police. During the middle part of that decade, this proportion dropped to between 55% and 60%.
- By 1995, however, the proportion of unarmed robberies had reverted to the 1981 situation, with 75.1% of all robberies defined as unarmed.

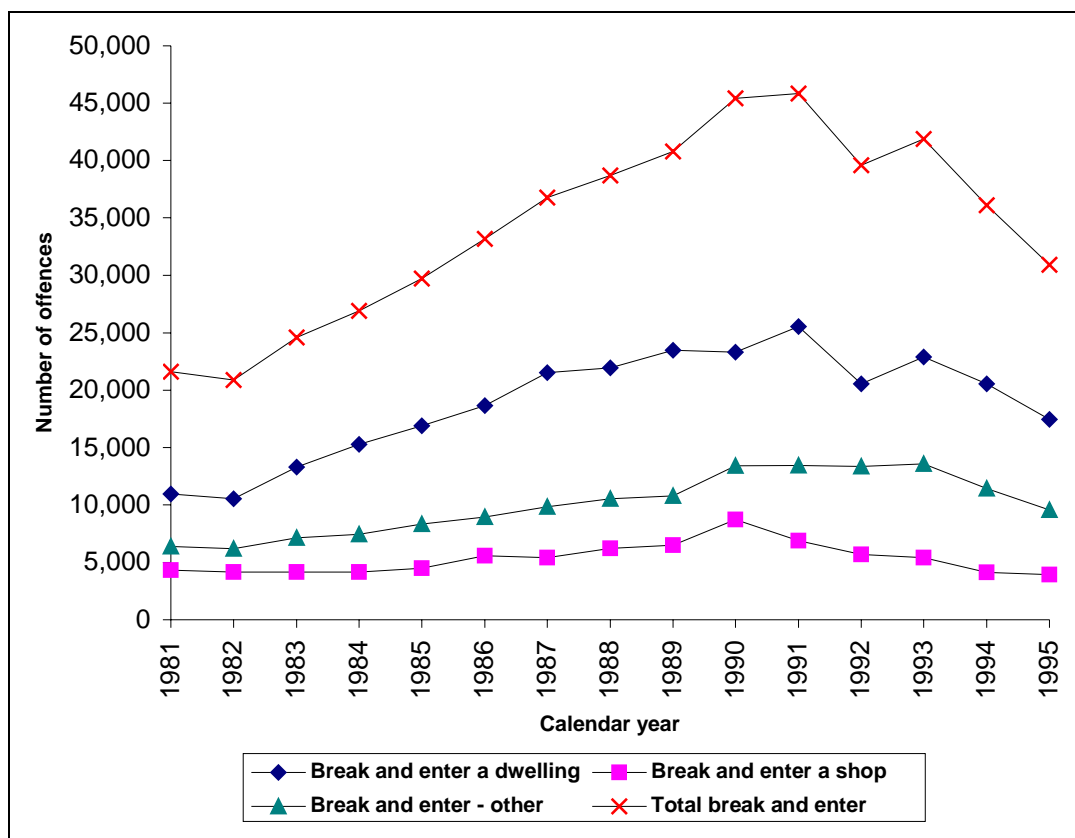
Total Offences Against Property

Figure 15: Offences against property



- Between 1994 and 1995, the number of offences against property which were reported or became known to police remained relatively stable (137,579 in 1995 compared with 137,257 in 1994.)
- However, Figure 15 shows that reported property offences increased steadily throughout the 1980s, reaching a peak of 158,963 in 1990.
- Since that time there has been a general downward trend, with the 1995 figure of 137,579 being 13.5% lower than that of 1990.
- This downward trend is reflected in many of the property offence sub-categories, as will be shown in the ensuing graphs.

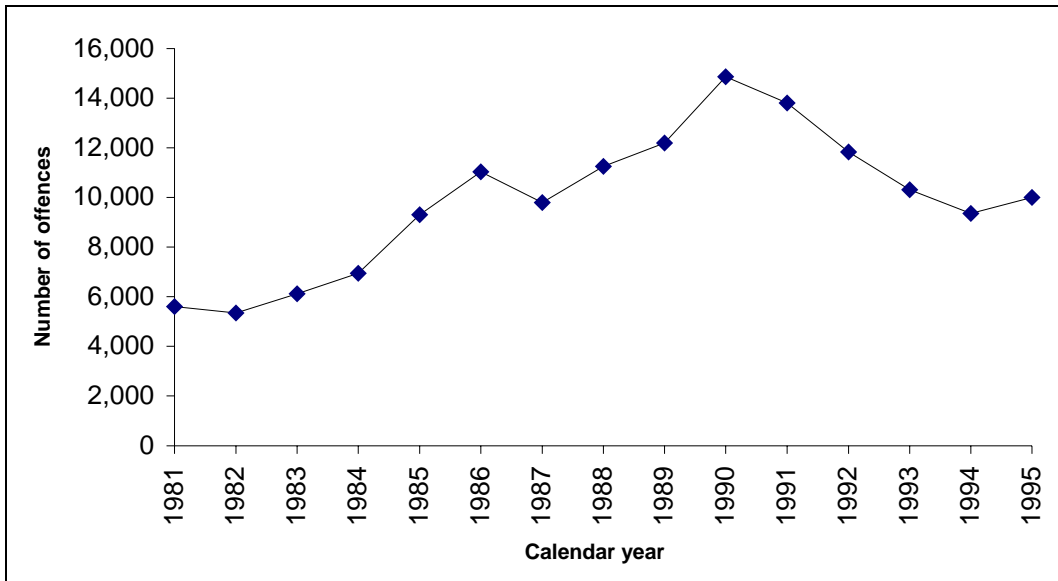
Figure 16: Break and enter offences



- As shown in Figure 16, total break and enter offences increased dramatically throughout the 1980s, reaching a peak in 1991.
- However, since that time a downward trend has become established, with figures decreasing by almost one third (32.6%) from 1991 to 1995. As a result, the 1995 figure is the lowest recorded since 1985.
- This recent downward trend applies to the three subcategories depicted in Figure 16. As shown, in 1995:
 - reported ‘break and enter dwelling’ offences were at their lowest level since 1986;
 - ‘break and enter’ shops were lower than at any point in the past fifteen years; and
 - ‘other break and enter’ offences were at their lowest level since 1987.
- One possible reason for these decreases is the increased use of security devices (such as security doors, burglar alarms, window screens etc.) and the greater emphasis on community-based crime prevention initiatives such as Neighborhood Watch.

Larceny of a Motor Vehicle

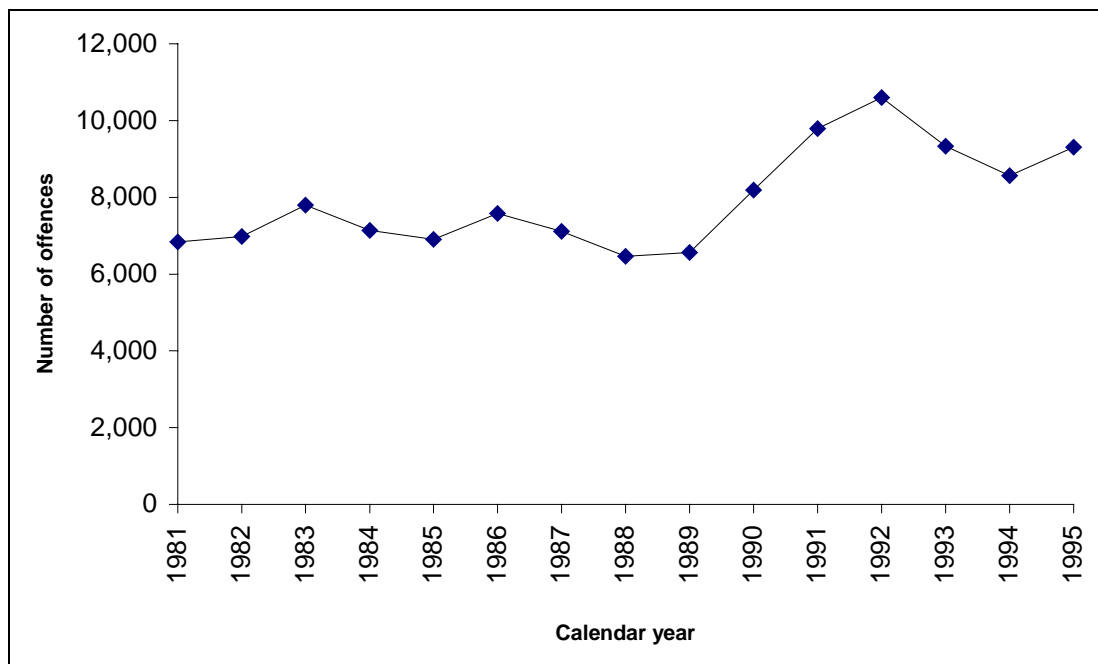
Figure 17: Larceny of a motor vehicle



- After a period of rapid increase during the 1980s, the number of motor vehicle thefts peaked in 1990, and have decreased sharply since then. In fact, in 1995, the number reported to police was 32.7% lower than in 1990, and comparable with the levels recorded a decade earlier.

Shop Theft

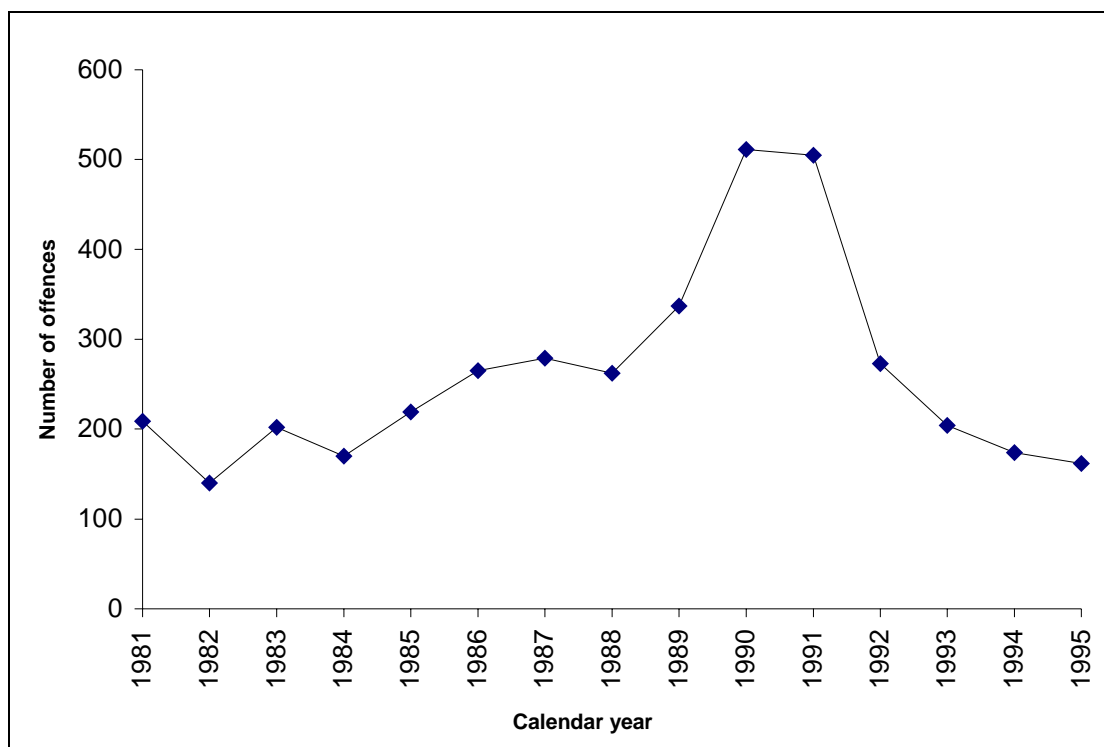
Figure 18: Shop theft



- In contrast to vehicle thefts, reported shop thefts remained relatively stable and even decreased slightly during the 1980s.
- It was not until after 1989 that numbers began to increase, reaching a peak in 1992. Thereafter, in line with trends observed for other property offences, a downward trend emerged.
- The figure recorded in 1995 was 31.2% lower than the peak of 5,698 recorded in 1992.

Steal From the Person

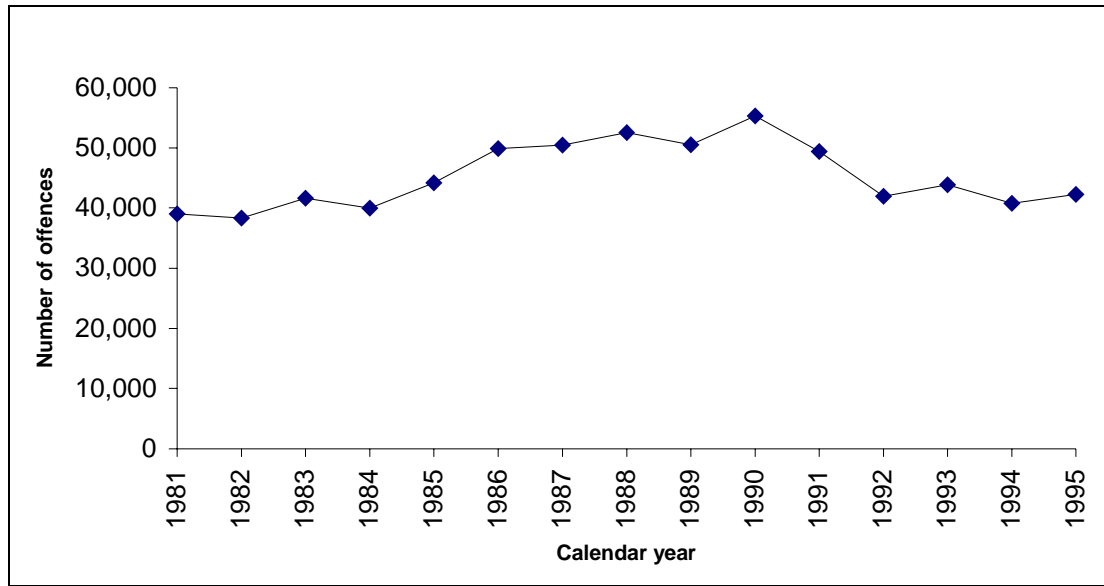
Figure 19: Steal from person



- The number of reported offences involving steal from the person is very low compared with the number recorded for the other ‘theft’ categories. In 1995, for example, only 162 such offences were reported to police compared with 9,304 shop thefts. Thus, even a comparatively small change in absolute numbers will result in large percentage shifts.
- As shown in Figure 19, numbers increased substantially in the latter part of the 1980s, reaching a peak in 1990 and 1991.

This was followed by an equally dramatic decrease with the result that by 1995, only 162 incidents of theft from the person were reported to police, compared with 505 in 1991. In fact, the 1995 figure was the lowest recorded since 1982.

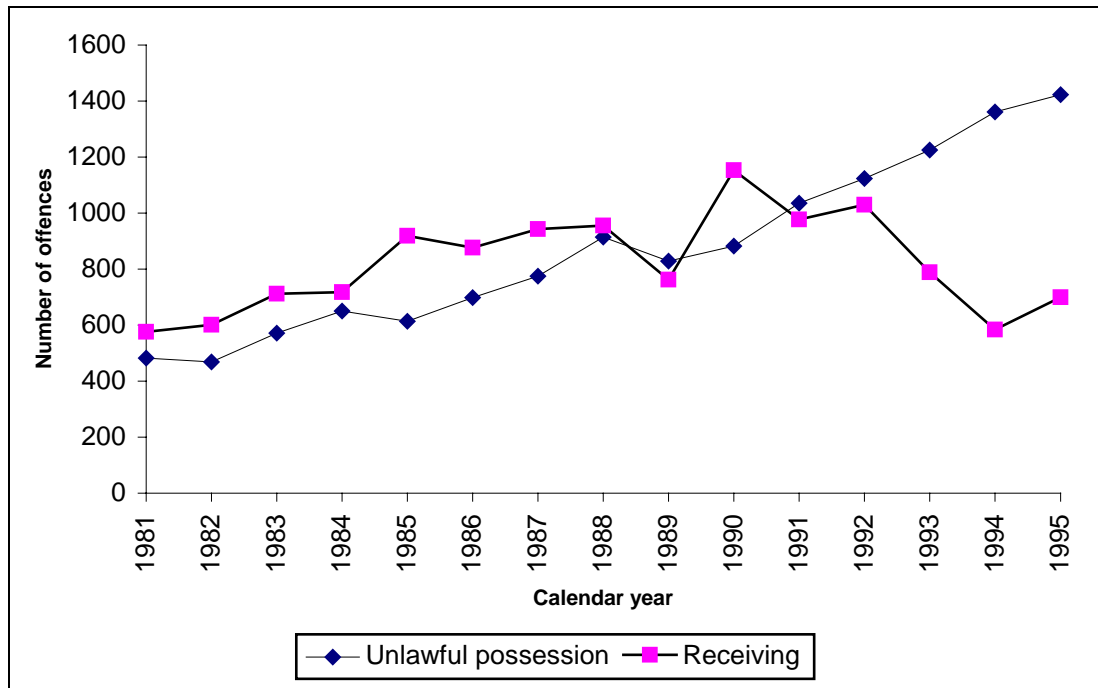
Figure 20: Other theft, n.e.c.



- Other theft (nec) increased from just under 40,000 in 1981 to just over 50,000 in 1990 - an increase of 29.4%. Since then there has been a dramatic decrease, with the 1995 figure of 42,286 being similar to the levels recorded a decade earlier.

Unlawful Possession of Property and Receiving

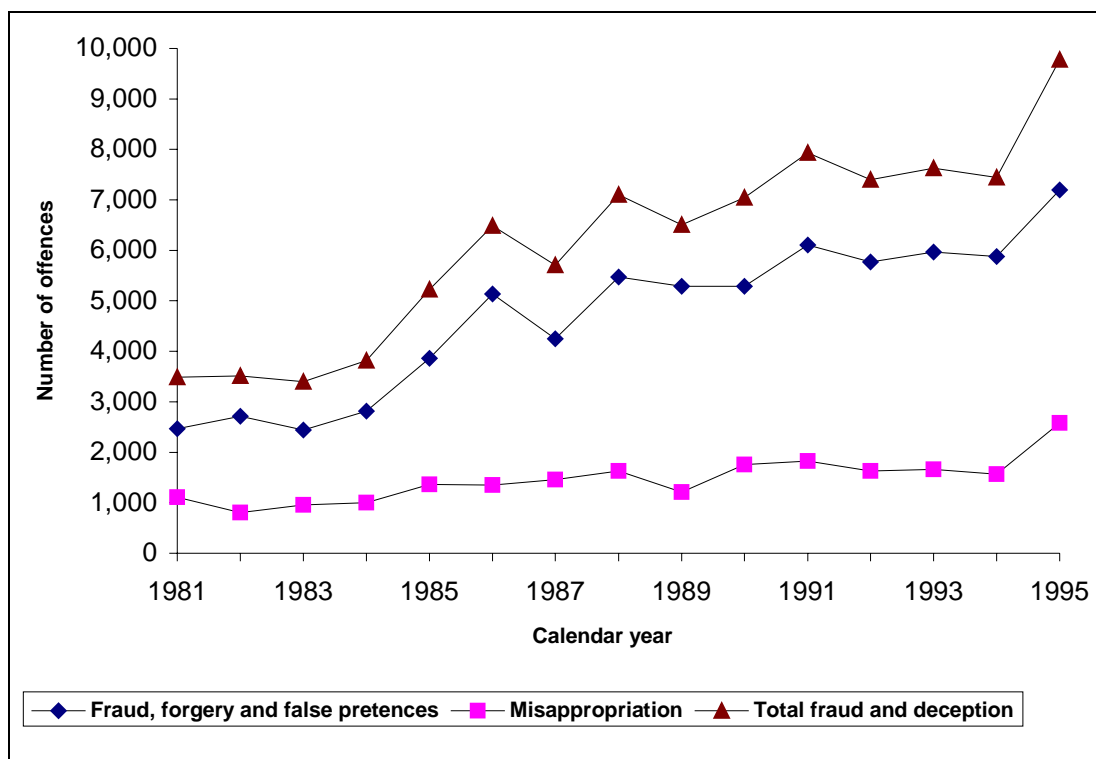
Figure 21: Unlawful possession and receiving



- In contrast with most of the other property offences, the number of unlawful possession of property offences reported or becoming known to police has increased steadily over the past one and a half decades, with 1995 figures being 9.1% higher than in 1994, 38.0% higher than in 1990 and 66.1% higher than in 1981.
- However, receiving showed a very definite downward trend during the 1990s, with the result that, despite a small increase in 1995, the most recent figures are still lower than those recorded some 13 years earlier in 1983.

Fraud and Deception

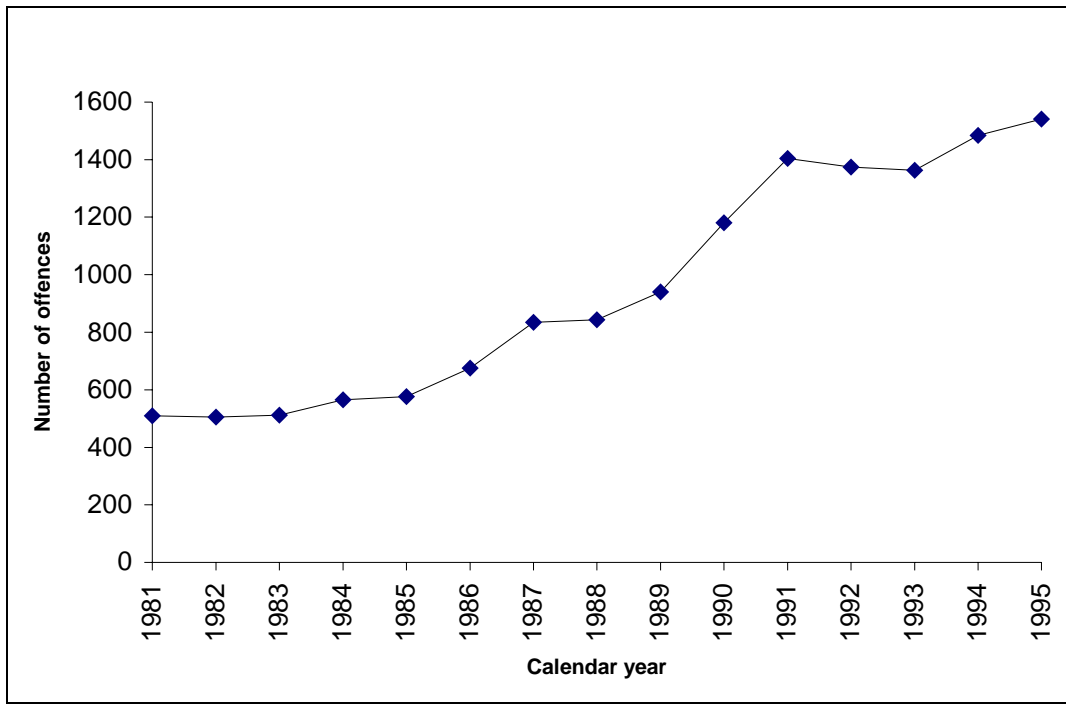
Figure 22: Fraud and Deception



- The number of offences involving fraud and deception increased substantially between 1994 and 1995, with the most recent figures being higher than any recorded previously.
- However these data should be interpreted with caution because, unlike most other offences, each count of fraud and deception is recorded as a separate offence. For example, if a cheque book is stolen and 20 false cheques are written on the same day, this will result in 20 separate offences being reported.

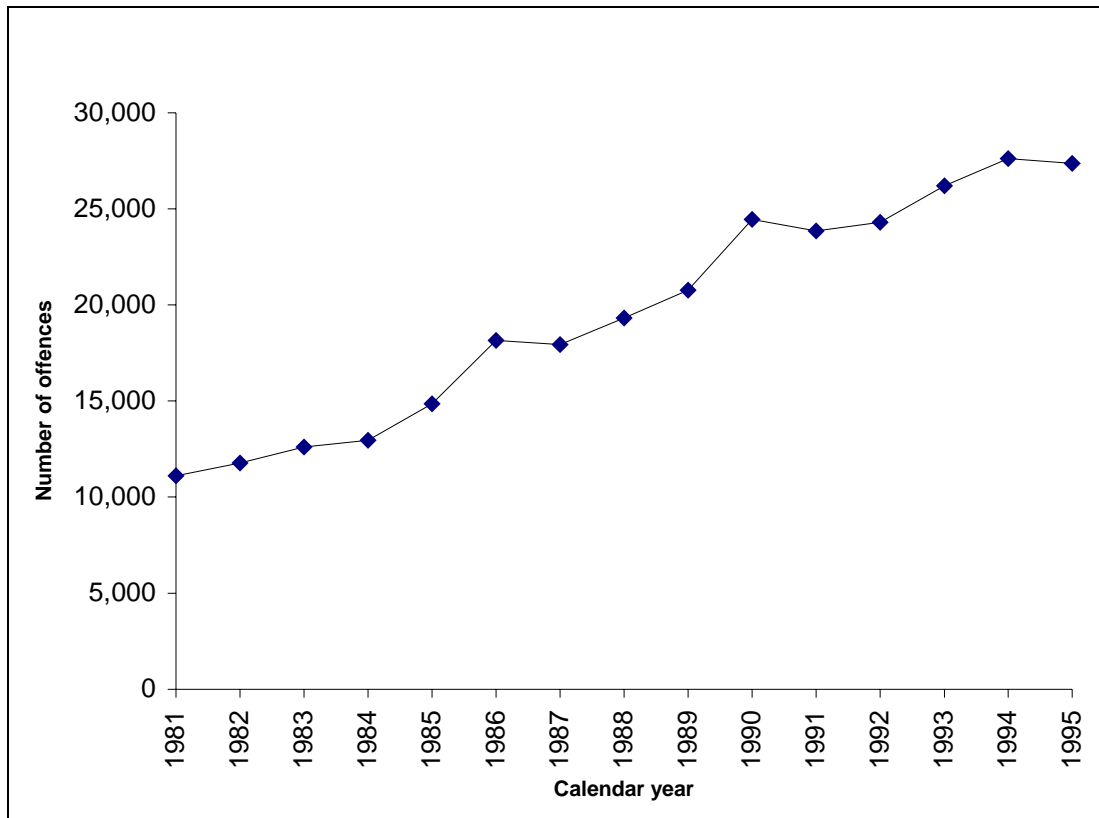
This offence sub-group is broken down into arson and ‘other’. Trends for these two types of property damage are detailed separately below.

Figure 23: Arson



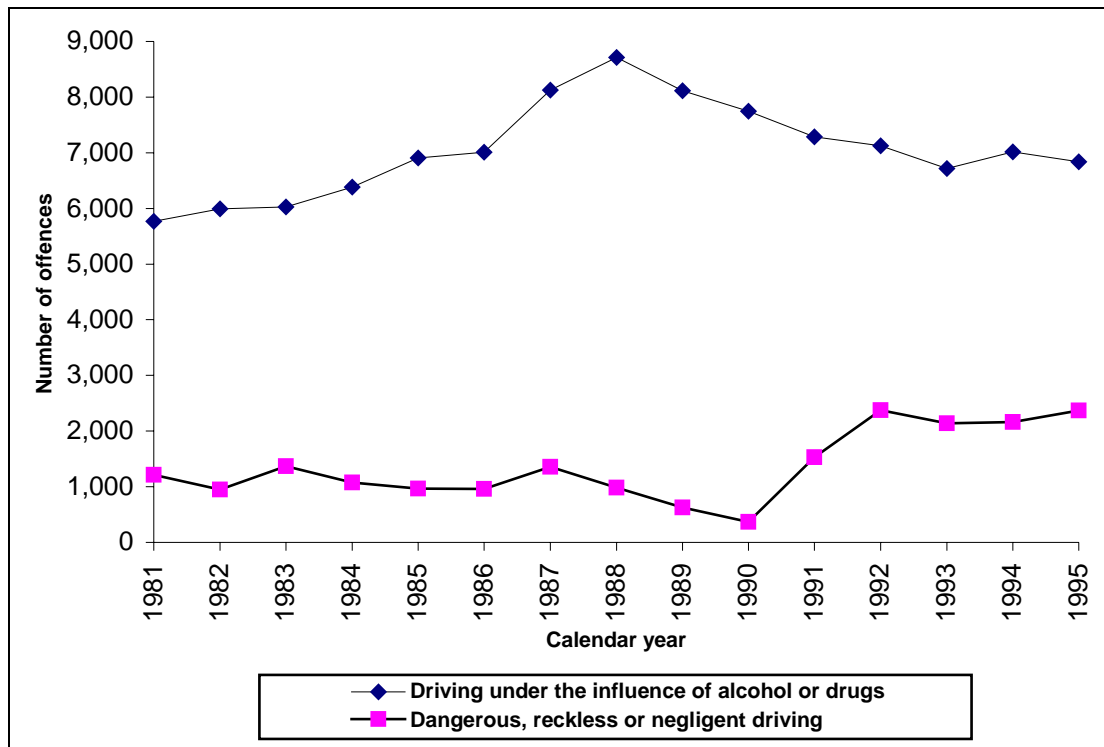
- As shown in Figure 23, the absolute number of arson offences recorded by police is relatively small. In comparison with certain other types of property offences. In fact, in 1995 arson accounted for only 5.3% of all “damage property” offences and only 1.1% of total property offences.
- Nevertheless, there has been a definite upward trend over the past 15 years, which was most pronounced during the latter part of the 1980s.
- From 1991 to 1993, numbers leveled off, but since that time they have increased; by 8.9% between 1993 and 1994, and by 3.8% between 1994 and 1995.

Figure 24: Damage property (exc. arson)



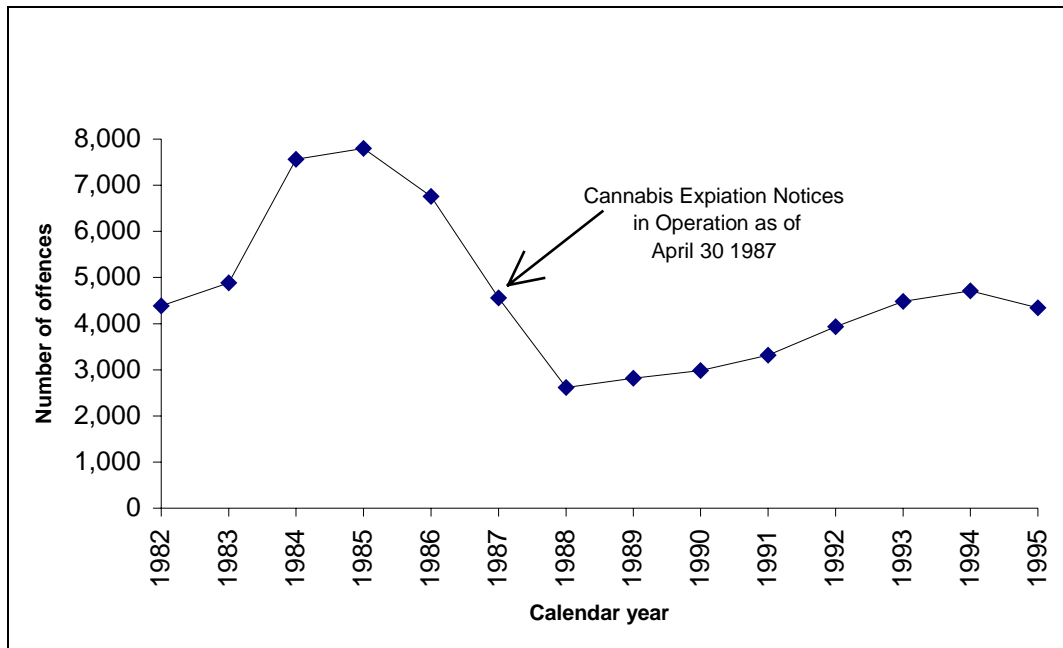
- In relation to property damage other than arson, numbers have increased steadily since the early 1980s with the 1995 figure being 146.5% higher than that recorded 15 years earlier in 1981.
- However, between 1994 and 1995, the situation stabilised, with a slight decrease of 0.9% being recorded.

Figure 25: Driving offences



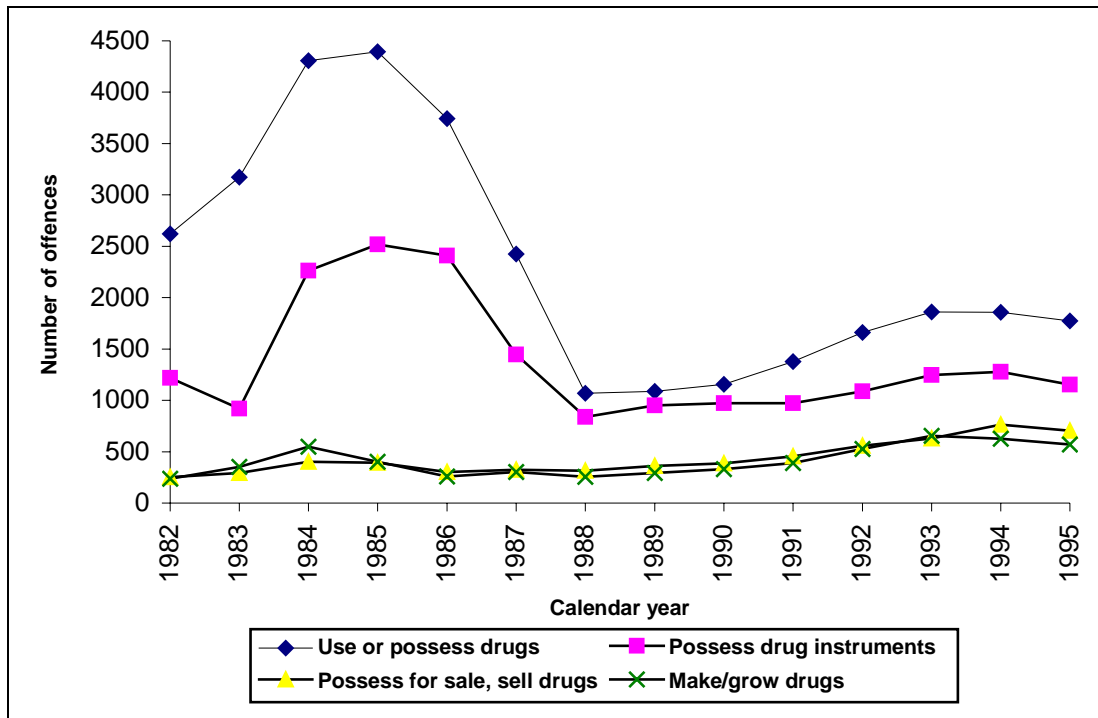
- In relation to driving offences, two specific types of crime will be described here: driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and dangerous, reckless driving. However, the pre-1993 figures for dangerous/reckless driving should be treated with caution because of the fact that until 1992 all such offences were not recorded on the centralised Justice Information System, with the result that under-enumeration is likely during this period.
- During the 1980s, there was a steady increase in the number of DUI offences coming to police attention. However, this peaked in 1988 and since that time, figures have decreased. The number reported in 1995 is, in fact, comparable with those recorded almost a decade earlier.
- According to the data available, the first major increase in the number of reported offences of dangerous, reckless or negligent driving occurred between 1990 and 1992. Thereafter, numbers have generally leveled off.

Figure 26: Total drug offences



- Data depicted in Figures 26 and 27 do not include Cannabis Expiation Notices (C.E.N.s). The C.E.N.s came into operation on the 30th April 1987 and can be issued to individuals aged 18 years and older, found in possession of limited amounts of cannabis. As a result comparison of trends before and after this date is difficult.
- As shown, even before the introduction of C.E.N.s, the number of drug offences reported to police had declined considerably from the 1985 peak. That decrease persisted during the year following C.E.N.s but since 1988 a gradual upward trend has become established, which continued until 1994. In 1995 the situation changed again with the number of drug offences reported decreasing by 8.3% - the first downward trend in seven years.
- A breakdown of the different drug offences are detailed in Figure 27. As shown the number of reported offences involving use or possession of drugs decreased from 1,858 in 1994 to 1,773 in 1995, a drop of 4.6%.
- The decrease observed in 1995 was the first decrease recorded since 1988, when the impact of cannabis expiation notices started to take effect.

Figure 27: Type of drug offence



- The longitudinal profile for offences involving the possession of drug instruments is somewhat similar to that of use of possess drugs offences. After a gradual increase from 1988 to 1994, most recent figures show a decrease of 9.8%.
- A decrease of 9.8% was also recorded between 1994 and 1995 for the offence of possess for sale, sell drugs. Again this was the first decrease since 1987.
- The make/grow drugs category was also down (by 8.9%) in 1995 compared with 1994. This follows a 4.3% decrease between 1993 and 1994. In total then, reported offences in this category have declined by 12.8% over the last three years.
- These decreases may be a result of anti drug initiatives targeted at growers and manufactures.

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