



OFFICE OF
CRIME STATISTICS
AND RESEARCH

OFFICE OF CRIME STATISTICS AND RESEARCH
GPO BOX 464 ADELAIDE SOUTH AUSTRALIA 5001
PH: (08) 8207 1731 FAX: (08) 8204 9575
www.ocsar.sa.gov.au



Government
of South Australia

J U N E 2 0 0 5

Recorded Crime Statistics:

Reasons for the difference between ABS National figures and OCSAR figures

JOY WUNDERSITZ

Introduction

When seeking information on recorded crime in South Australia, a number of publications may be used. Key amongst these are those produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Office of Crime Statistics and Research (OCSAR).

Recorded Crime - Victims, Australia (cat. no. 4510.0), published annually by the National Crime Statistics Unit within the ABS, provides national statistics for selected crimes recorded by police during the previous calendar year as well as state by state breakdowns for those same offences. The most recent report in this series was released on 23 June 2005 and provides data for the 2004 calendar year.

The Office of Crime Statistics and Research also publishes crime statistics for South Australia on a calendar year basis, as part of its *Crime and Justice in South Australia* series. The first volume of that three volume report provides detailed information on the number of offences recorded by police over the 12 month period across a broad range of offence categories.

The two sets of reports serve different purposes. *Recorded Crime, Australia* is designed to compare levels of recorded crime across states and territories, thereby allowing each jurisdiction to identify how it 'sits' in relation to the other jurisdictions and to determine whether its longitudinal trends differ from those observed in other states. To ensure comparability across states and territories the ABS has developed standardised counting rules for, and therefore only reports on, a very small number of offence categories only: namely, *homicide and related offences, kidnapping/abduction, robbery, blackmail/extortion, unlawful entry with intent, motor vehicle theft* and *other theft*.¹

¹ This list of offence categories has changed somewhat over the last 11 years, with *assault* and *other theft* included for the first time in 1995 and *assault* and *sexual assault* removed in 2004 because a project conducted by the ABS National Crime Statistics Unit (NCSU) investigating *Differences in Recorded Crime Statistics* (DiRCS) found evidence that the recording of these two offences was not comparable across all states and territories.

In contrast, OCSAR's *Crime and Justice* reports focus exclusively on South Australia and are designed to provide as much information as possible on the nature and extent of recorded crime in this state and how this has changed over time. To this end, it contains details on hundreds of different offence categories.

Despite these different objectives, there are some commonalities between the ABS and OCSAR reports. For example, the statistics in both publications are derived from the same source, namely the South Australia Police's mainframe databases. Both capture only those offences recorded by police, and therefore do not provide a reflection of the actual level of crime in the community. Moreover, both use calendar year data, are produced annually and are released at approximately the same time each year.

As a result of these similarities, it is somewhat inevitable that comparisons will be drawn between the two publications. However, any attempt to compare the two sets of statistics are not valid, for a variety of reasons.

The aim of this Technical Paper is to explain what those differences are, so that readers will have a better understanding of the different uses to which the two reports can be put.

Comparing the ABS and OCSAR 2004 figures

For some of the offence categories where classification and counting procedures are relatively straightforward, the differences between the ABS and OCSAR's figures are non-existent. For example, in 2004, both sets indicated that there were 28 *murders* and 11 *drive causing death* offences recorded in South Australia.

For some other offence categories, while there were some differences, these were relatively small. For example,

- OCSAR's figures showed that in 2004 there were 1,242 *robberies* recorded by police, including 502 *armed robberies* and 740 *unarmed robberies*. The ABS figures were very similar - 1,239 *robberies* of which 505 were *armed robberies* and 734 were *unarmed robberies*.
- Similarly, OCSAR's statistics showed 10,573 *motor vehicle thefts* compared with 10,206 recorded in the ABS publication
- For *blackmail/extortion*, OCSAR identified 45 such offences compared with the ABS's figure of 44.

However, for other categories there were marked differences. For example,

- OCSAR's collection showed that in 2004 there were 149 *kidnapping and abduction* offences recorded by police, compared with only 36 recorded by the ABS.
- For *other theft nec*, OCSAR reported 39,955 offences compared with 52,500 *other thefts* identified by the ABS.

The final offence category included in the ABS's national report is that of *Unlawful Entry with Intent (UEWI)*, which is further subdivided into *UEWI - involving the taking of property* and *UEWI - other*. OCSAR's reports do not include a category specifically labelled as *UEWI*. Instead, it reports on the broad grouping of *serious criminal trespass* which, while broadly comparable with that of *UEWI*, does not provide a 100% overlap. In 2004, the ABS identified 26,728 offences within the *UEWI* category while OCSAR reported 27,147 within its *Serious Criminal Trespass* category.

Reasons for the differences between the two collections

There are three main factors which explain the differences between the OCSAR and ABS statistics, each of which are described below.

1. Different timing of data extractions

SAPOL provides monthly data downloads to OCSAR which the Office then uses to produce its annual *Crime and Justice* reports. In contrast, SAPOL provides an annual download to the ABS, which means that the data is extracted on a different date to the OCSAR extract. Because operational data on SAPOL's mainframe system is constantly being updated and audited, there will inevitably be some differences depending on the timing of the extraction process. While these differences are small, they do account for some of the variation between the two sets of statistics, particularly the small differences noted for categories such as *robbery*.

2. Differences in the offence classifications used

OCSAR and the ABS use two quite different systems for the classification of offences.

The first national classificatory system developed by the ABS in the mid 1980s was that of ANCO (Australian National Classification of Offences). It is this one which OCSAR and all other criminal justice agencies in South Australia use when reporting on offending in this state. ANCO contains eight major offence categories which, in turn, have been subdivided into a number of more specific offence sub-categories.

In 1997, the ABS developed a new classificatory system, referred to as ASOC - the Australian Standard Offence Classification - and it is this system which, since 1999, has been used by the ABS for their national reporting. The broad differences between the two classificatory systems are outlined in Appendix 1.

As shown, while ANCO contains eight broad categories, ASOC contains 16. Moreover, the specific offence types that comprise each category differ across the two classificatory systems. For example, under ANCO, the category of *kidnapping and abduction* includes not only kidnapping but also those offences related to the deprivation of liberty and false imprisonment. In contrast, under ASOC, there are two distinct categories: *abduction and kidnapping* and *deprivation of liberty/false imprisonment*. (See ABS publication 1234.0 Appendix 3 - ANCO/ASOC Concordance table).

The fact that South Australia and the ABS use two different classificatory systems explains why OCSAR, under its *kidnapping and abduction* category recorded 149 offences, but the ABS only recorded 36. When OCSAR re-ran its 2004 data using ASOC as the classificatory system, we found that there were 36 *kidnapping and abduction* offences and 113 *deprivation of liberty/false imprisonment* offences recorded by police. This is exactly the same figure for *kidnapping and abduction* as that included in the ABS publication.

The use of different classificatory systems also explains why OCSAR (and other South Australian criminal justice agencies) do not have an offence category of *Unlawful Entry with Intent*, but do have categories on *Serious Criminal Trespass* and *Aggravated Serious*

Criminal Trespass which, while broadly similar to the *UEWI* category, do differ in some minor ways.

The other major category included in the national report for which there is no direct concordance between the ASOC and ANCO classificatory systems is that of *other theft*. As noted above, whereas OCSAR reported that there were 39,955 offences in its *other theft nec* category in 2004 (as determined by the ANCO classificatory system), the ABS counted 52,500 in what they classify as *other theft*. The main reason for these differences is that the types of offences that OCSAR reports on under *other theft nec* in accordance with ANCO is quite different from what the ABS classifies as *other theft*, using ASOC categories. For example, in addition to *other theft nec*, the ABS includes *illegal use of property other than a motor vehicle*, *larceny from a motor vehicle*, and *theft from retail premises*. OCSAR reports on these separately. However, even if these additional categories are included, then the OCSAR total for *other theft* is 70,525, which is still clearly different from the ABS figure. This discrepancy between the two collections can largely be explained in terms of different counting rules (see point 3 below).

South Australia is currently considering whether to change from using ANCO to ASOC for state based reporting, but to do so would result in significant changes to the offence categories used and make comparisons over time difficult. As well having implications for statistical monitoring, it also has considerable operational implications for some agencies, particularly SAPOL. Until this decision is made, all criminal justice agencies in this state will continue to classify offences according to ANCO for internal reporting, but where nationally comparable data are required for ABS collections, data will continue to be provided to them according to the ASOC classificatory system.

3 Differences in counting rules

The third and probably the most important difference between the two collections is the counting rules used.

OCSAR count all offences and all counts listed on each Incident Report lodged by police. This means that if, during the same incident, a victim reports having been robbed and in the course of that robbery, he/she is separately assaulted by each of two assailants, this could be listed by police on the one incident report as

- 1 armed robbery; and
- 2 assaults.

OCSAR would count all three offences - namely one *armed robbery* and two *assaults*. In contrast, the ABS count on the basis of what it terms 'victimisations'. Within each of its broad offence categories, it counts only one entry per incident report. Thus, in the above example, it would count one *armed robbery* and one *assault* only.

The other counting difference applies specifically to the category of *UEWI* and *other theft*. In South Australia, prior to 1999, if a person had his/her house broken into and property was taken, this would have been recorded on the PIR as one *break and enter*. However, with the introduction of *serious criminal trespass* in late 1999, police now record both a *serious criminal trespass* offence as well as an *other theft* on the one incident report. OCSAR counts both offences - one under *serious criminal trespass* and one under *other theft*. In contrast, the ABS only counts one offence - namely *UEWI involving the taking of property*.

This difference between OCSAR and the ABS helps to explain the considerable difference between the two collections in the number of *other thefts* recorded.

Conclusion

In summary then, attempting to compare the statistics provided by OCSAR with those released by the ABS as part of their national reporting is fraught with difficulties. This is acknowledged by the ABS (*Recorded Crime*, 2004, p.30):

The national offence definitions and counting methodology vary from those used in each jurisdiction. Hence, the statistics presented in this publication may be different from those published by police forces in individual states and territories.

The two collections serve two quite different purposes and both are equally valid. The key is to understand the complex differences in classifications, counting rules etc. that are used to extract the two sets of figures, which are documented in both the ABS and OCSAR publications.

Appendix 1

Table 1 A comparison between ANCO and ASOC Classificatory systems

ANCO Division		ASOC Division	
1	Offences against the person including acts endangering life generally	01	Homicide and related offences
2	Robbery and Extortion	02	Acts intended to cause injury
3	Breaking and entering, burglary, and unlawful entry; fraud, forgery and false pretences; and other offences involving theft	03	Sexual assault and related offences
4	Property damage and environmental offences	04	Dangerous or negligent acts endangering persons
5	Offences against good order	05	Abduction and related offences
6	Drug offences	06	Robbery, extortion and related offences
7	Driving, motor vehicle, traffic and related offences	07	Unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter
8	Other offences	08	Theft and related offences
		09	Deception and related offences
		10	Illicit drug offences
		11	Weapons and explosives offences
		12	Property damage and environmental pollution
		13	Public order offences
		14	Road traffic and motor vehicle regulatory offences
		15	Offences against justice procedures, government security and government operations
		16	Miscellaneous offences