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DRUG AND THEFT OFFENCES IN CABRAMATTA LOCAL AREA COMMAND: 1998 TO 2000

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Over the three years from January 1998 to December 2000 the number of recorded incidents for drug offences in Cabramatta Local Area Command (LAC) has fallen, indicating that police are apprehending fewer drug offenders. Over the same period the number of recorded incidents for receiving and goods in custody has also fallen sharply. The number of recorded incidents for theft offences, other than receiving and goods in custody, in Cabramatta LAC fell between 1998 and 1999 but rose between 1999 and 2000.

The level of crime in Cabramatta is the subject of frequent attention in the media. Many reports appear to be based on speculation and anecdotal evidence. This brief examines recorded crime statistics for drug and theft offences for the Cabramatta Local Area Command (LAC) for the years 1998 to 2000. Rates of offending per 100,000 population in Cabramatta LAC are compared to corresponding rates for the whole of NSW. Trends in the monthly incidence of drug and theft crime for the 24 months from January 1999 to December 2000

are presented.¹ Where the trends are significant the magnitude of the change is indicated by the percentage change in the annual totals for 1999 and 2000.

INCIDENCE OF DRUG OFFENCES

Cabramatta is a known centre of dealing and trafficking in drugs, particularly heroin. Table 1 shows the rate per 100,000 population of recorded drug offences in Cabramatta LAC² and NSW. It is important to note that drug offences are normally detected by police rather than

Table 1: Rate per 100,000 resident population for recorded drug offences, Cabramatta LAC and NSW 1998 to 2000

Drug offence	1998		1999		2000	
	Cabramatta LAC	NSW	Cabramatta LAC	NSW	Cabramatta LAC	NSW
Possession and/or use of cocaine	12.8	4.4	32.8	3.1	30.9	3.2
Possession and/or use of narcotics	2,100.0	47.7	1,697.7	47.0	1,173.3	37.8
Possession and/or use of cannabis	351.5	178.1	313.6	179.5	167.1	168.0
Possession and/or use of other drugs	153.8	28.8	109.4	35.9	99.9	39.1
Dealing, trafficking in cocaine	1.8	2.0	5.5	3.2	3.6	1.4
Dealing, trafficking in narcotics	463.2	12.0	399.3	13.5	279.7	12.8
Dealing, trafficking in cannabis	11.0	17.3	16.4	15.4	3.6	13.1
Dealing, trafficking in other drugs	16.5	7.6	7.3	8.9	12.7	11.6
Cultivating cannabis	22.0	36.2	7.3	30.3	9.1	24.9
Other drug offences	344.2	49.7	211.5	47.6	178.0	42.5
Total drug offences	3,476.7	383.7	2,800.9	384.4	1,957.9	354.4

Table 2: Recorded incidents for drug offences, Cabramatta LAC and NSW 1998 to 2000

<i>Drug offence</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>24-month trend 1999 to 2000</i>	<i>Annual % change 1999 to 2000</i>
Possession and/or use of cocaine	7	18	17	Not significant	
Possession and/or use of narcotics	1147	931	646	Downward	-30.6
Possession and/or use of cannabis	192	172	92	Downward	-46.5
Possession and/or use of other drugs	84	60	55	Not significant	
Dealing, trafficking in cocaine	1	3	2	Not significant	
Dealing, trafficking in narcotics	253	219	154	Not significant	
Dealing, trafficking in cannabis	6	9	2	Not significant	
Dealing, trafficking in other drugs	9	4	7	Not significant	
Cultivating cannabis	12	4	5	Not significant	
Other drug offences	188	116	98	Not significant	
Total drug offences	1899	1536	1078	Downward	-29.8

reported to police. Changes, over time, in the rates of recorded incidents for drug offences in a specific area reflect changes in the level of police activity in attempting to apprehend drug offenders in that area. On the other hand, comparisons of rates between different areas show the relative seriousness of the drug problem in each area. Very high rates of recorded incidents for drug offences in an area indicate a serious drug problem. It is also important to recognise that the rates for the Cabramatta LAC will be inflated by the number of non-residents who travel to Cabramatta to purchase drugs.

It is clear that the Cabramatta LAC has very high rates of recorded incidents for drug offences. In 2000, for example, Cabramatta LAC accounted for 26.4 per cent of possession of narcotics offences and 18.6 per cent of dealing and trafficking in narcotics offences but less than 0.9 per cent of the population of NSW. For offences involving narcotics, the rates are up to forty times the NSW rate. For cocaine and 'other' drugs the offending rates for Cabramatta LAC, while much lower than for narcotics, are still many times the NSW rates. For cannabis the offending rates for Cabramatta LAC are much closer to, and sometimes lower than, the NSW rates.

Table 2 shows the number of recorded drug offences in each of the years 1998, 1999 and 2000 for Cabramatta LAC and the results of the tests for trend in the monthly incidence of drug offences for the 24 months from January 1999 to December 2000. There has been a general decline in the number of recorded incidents for drug offences in the Cabramatta LAC in the years 1998 to 2000. There were statistically significant downward trends in the monthly incidence of possession and/or use of narcotics, possession and/or use of cannabis and total drug offences. The annual number of recorded incidents of possession and/or use of narcotics fell 30.6 per cent, the annual number of recorded incidents of possession and/or use of cannabis fell 45.6 per cent

and the annual total number of recorded incidents for drug offences fell 29.8 per cent between 1999 and 2000. The monthly trend in the incidence of dealing and trafficking in narcotics, which fell by a similar percentage, just failed to reach the 0.05 significance level ($p=0.055$).

INCIDENCE OF THEFT OFFENCES

It is well established that many drug dependent people resort to property crime to fund their drug use. It is therefore reasonable to expect high rates of theft to be recorded in and around areas with high rates of drug offending. Table 3 shows the rate per 100,000 population of theft offences for Cabramatta LAC compared with the rate for all of NSW. Unlike drug offences most theft crimes are reported to police. The exceptions are receiving and goods in custody which are mainly detected by police. Like recorded drug offences, the incidence of receiving and goods in custody offences is more a measure of police activity than an indication of the scale of crime.

Table 3 indicates that, over the three years 1998 to 2000, the annual rates per 100,000 population for break and enter – dwelling, possess implements, motor vehicle theft, steal from person and fraud offences in Cabramatta LAC are consistently and considerably higher than the corresponding rates for NSW. The annual rates for break and enter – non-dwelling, steal from motor vehicle, steal from retail store, steal from dwelling and other theft offences are consistently and considerably lower in Cabramatta than the corresponding rates for NSW. The annual rates for receiving are two to three times higher and the annual rates for goods in custody are from five to eight times higher in Cabramatta LAC than in NSW as a whole. For total theft offences, excluding receiving and goods in custody, there is little difference in the rates per 100,000 population for Cabramatta LAC and NSW. When receiving and goods in custody are included in total theft offences the rates for Cabramatta LAC are from nine to twenty per cent higher than the corresponding rates for NSW.

Table 3: Rate per 100,000 resident population for theft offences, Cabramatta LAC and NSW 1998 to 2000

<i>Theft offence</i>	<i>1998</i>		<i>1999</i>		<i>2000</i>	
	<i>Cabramatta LAC</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Cabramatta LAC</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Cabramatta LAC</i>	<i>NSW</i>
Break and enter – dwelling	1,821.7	1,354.2	1,331.1	1,213.3	1,749.0	1,250.8
Break and enter – non-dwelling	514.5	770.1	413.9	716.9	613.9	766.9
Possess implements	153.8	25.3	93.0	24.4	174.4	26.4
Motor vehicle theft	1,312.7	850.5	1,316.6	755.5	1,516.5	808.8
Steal from motor vehicle	877.0	1,192.0	964.6	1,216.0	1,253.2	1,385.9
Steal from retail store	179.4	333.3	153.2	329.1	281.5	325.9
Steal from dwelling	274.6	489.2	242.5	474.0	263.3	490.0
Steal from person	371.7	183.6	339.2	181.1	392.3	197.4
Fraud	516.3	414.1	661.9	421.2	599.3	409.0
Other theft	476.0	920.0	621.8	1011.3	672.0	1,121.9
Subtotal	6,497.6	6,532.4	6,137.9	6,342.7	7,515.4	6,783.1
Receiving	150.1	43.7	100.3	35.4	61.8	29.7
Goods in custody	1,124.1	133.2	875.3	149.1	773.7	145.4
Total theft offences	7,771.9	6,709.3	7,113.4	6,527.2	8,350.9	6,958.1

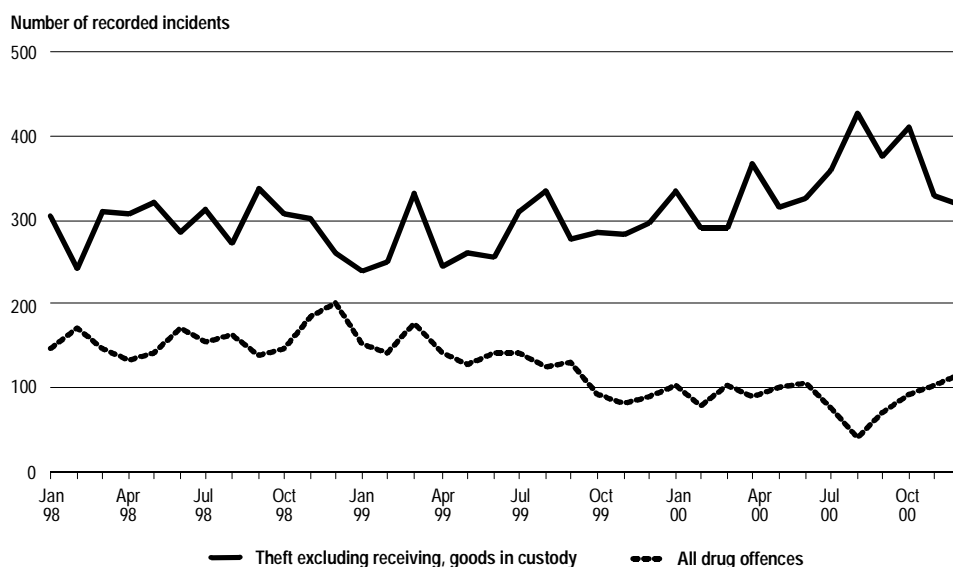
Table 4 shows the number of recorded theft offences in each of the years 1998, 1999 and 2000 for Cabramatta LAC and the results of the tests for trend in the monthly incidence of theft offences for the 24 months from January 1999 to December 2000. There is a clear pattern of increase in the incidence of theft offences in Cabramatta LAC in the years 1998 to 2000. There were statistically significant upward trends in the monthly incidence of break and enter – dwelling, break and enter – non-dwelling, motor vehicle theft, steal from motor vehicle, and steal from person over the 24 months from January 1999 to December 2000. Between 1999 and 2000, the number of break and enter – dwelling offences

increased by 31.9 per cent, the number of break and enter – non-dwelling offences increased by 48.9 per cent, the number of motor vehicle theft offences increased by 15.7 per cent, the number of steal from motor vehicle offences increased by 30.4 per cent, and the number of steal from person offences increased by 16.1 per cent. The annual totals for receiving and goods in custody have declined each year from 1998 to 2000 though there is no significant downward trend in the monthly incidence of these offences over the 24 months from January 1999 to December 2000. There was a significant upward trend over the 24 months from January 1999 to December 2000 in the monthly incidence of total theft

Table 4: Recorded incidents for theft offences, Cabramatta LAC and NSW 1998 to 2000

<i>Drug offence</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>24-month trend 1999 to 2000</i>	<i>Annual % change 1999 to 2000</i>
Break and enter – dwelling	995	730	963	Upward	31.9
Break and enter – non-dwelling	281	227	338	Upward	48.9
Possess implements	84	51	96	Not significant	
Motor vehicle theft	717	722	835	Upward	15.7
Steal from motor vehicle	479	529	690	Upward	30.4
Steal from retail store	98	84	155	Not significant	
Steal from dwelling	150	133	145	Not significant	
Steal from person	203	186	216	Upward	16.1
Fraud	282	363	330	Not significant	
Other theft	260	341	370	Not significant	
Subtotal	3,549	3,366	4,138	Upward	22.9
Receiving	82	55	34	Not significant	
Goods in custody	614	480	426	Not significant	
Total theft offences	4,245	3,901	4,598	Upward	17.9

Figure 1: Incidence of drug offences and theft offences, Cabramatta LAC, 1998 to 2000



offences both excluding receiving and goods in custody (up by 22.9%) and including receiving and goods in custody (up by 17.9%).

Figure 1 graphically displays the information set out above. As noted the number of drug offences detected is largely a measure of policing activity. Receiving and goods in custody offences have been excluded from the theft category because they also measure policing. The general increase in the number of recorded theft offences and the decline in the number of detected drug offences are clearly illustrated.

SUMMARY

Cabramatta LAC has very high rates of drug offending, particularly for narcotics offences. The number of drug offences detected by police has declined substantially between 1998 and 2000. This fact notwithstanding, in 2000, police at Cabramatta LAC detected drug offences at five times the rate and narcotics offences at twenty to thirty times the rate of NSW as a whole.

The pattern of theft offences recorded for Cabramatta LAC is far less simple. The rates for receiving and goods in custody offences are much higher than for NSW as a whole. These rates have declined between 1998 and 2000

though there was no statistically significant downward trend in the monthly incidence of these offences in the 24 months from January 1999 to December 2000. Despite this decline, in 2000, the rate of detection of receiving offences in Cabramatta LAC was more than twice that of NSW as a whole. The rate of detection of goods in custody offences in Cabramatta LAC was more than five times that of NSW as a whole.

The number of theft offences recorded for Cabramatta LAC has risen between 1998 and 2000. For the 24 months from January 1999 to December 2000 there have been statistically significant upward trends for half of the theft offences and for total theft offences. For the offences of break and enter – non-dwelling, motor vehicle theft and steal from motor vehicle there were also significant upward trends in NSW as a whole but the magnitude of the rise between 1999 and 2000 was approximately twice as great in Cabramatta LAC as in NSW overall. The monthly incidence of break and enter – dwelling and steal from person offences showed statistically significant upward trends for the 24 months from January 1999 to December 2000 in Cabramatta LAC but there was no corresponding upward trend for all of NSW.

NOTES

- 1 The trend test used was Kendall's rank-order correlation test (see, for example, Conover, W.J. 1980, *Practical Non-Parametric Statistics*, 2nd edn, John Wiley and Sons, pp. 256-260). A two tailed test was used to determine whether there had been an increasing or decreasing trend in the recorded numbers of criminal incidents over the most recent twenty-four month period covered in the brief. The test for trend is not sensitive to seasonal variations; it is sensitive only to a generally increasing or generally decreasing trend over the time period examined.
- 2 Annual population numbers are not available for Cabramatta LAC. Population estimates have been used for rate calculations. At the 1996 census the population of the area covered by Cabramatta LAC was 54,186. The population is very stable with an average annual growth rate in Fairfield Local Government Area of only 0.4 per cent between 1995 and 2000. Applying this growth rate gives estimates of 54,620 (1998), 54,840 (1999) and 55,060 (2000)