

AN UPDATE OF LONG-TERM TRENDS IN PROPERTY AND VIOLENT CRIME IN NEW SOUTH WALES: 1990-2006

Steve Moffatt & Derek Goh

This paper describes trends in the recorded incidence of major categories of property and violent crime between 1990 and 2006 in New South Wales. The data presented here are an update of the property and violent crime trends reported in Bulletin Number 90. Using Kendall's trend test on the 17 annual rates for each offence category, we conclude that significant long-term upward trends are current for assault, sexual assault, other sexual offences and robbery without a weapon. Statistically significant downward trends were observed for murder, robbery with a firearm and motor vehicle theft, with the remaining three categories (robbery with a weapon not a firearm, break and enter - dwelling and break and enter - non-dwelling) from Table 1 yielding a long term stable result.

DATA SOURCES

With the exception of murder, the data presented here refer to the number of police recorded criminal incidents per 100,000 population. For murder, rates are calculated on the numbers of murder victims per 100,000 population. Data from the NSW Police Force Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) have been used to calculate offence rates for the period 1995-2006. Criminal incident data for 1994 and for the years prior to the introduction of COPS have been taken from the Bureau's recorded crime statistics report series, NSW Recorded Crime Statistics.

Given that recorded crime data include only crimes that come to the attention of the police and not all criminal acts are reported to the authorities, the trends in recorded crime presented here should be compared with data from crime victim surveys. A summary of these data for the period to 2004 is provided in Moffatt and Poynton (2006) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 catalogue, Crime and Safety NSW April 2006, Cat No. 4509.1, ABS, Sydney.

PERSONAL CRIME

Figure 1 shows the number of *murder* victims in NSW per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2006. Figures 2, 3 and 4 show the number of recorded *assault*, *sexual offences*

and *robbery* incidents per 100,000 population from 1990 to 2006, respectively. The major points to note from these figures are:

- ◆ A significant downward trend is apparent in the NSW *murder* rate (down 34%) over the 17-year period. The 2004 recorded rate was 1.0 murder victims per 100,000 population for the year. This was well below the long-term linear trend. Since then the 2005 and 2006 rates have moved upwards in line with the long term trend.
- ◆ A significant upward trend in the NSW *assault* rate (up 106%) can be seen over the 16-year period. In the early 1990's the recorded *assault* rate was about 500 incidents per 100,000 population. However, by 2001 the recorded *assault* rate had climbed to over 1,000 incidents per 100,000 population. The 2006 *assault* rate is now on a par with the 2001 rate.
- ◆ A significant upward trend in the recorded crime rate of both sexual assault (up 111%) and other *sexual offences*¹ (up 79%) in NSW over the 17-year period. In both cases, however, most of the increase occurred in the mid to late 1990s. After 1997 the recorded rate of *sexual assault* fell back from 57.4 incidents to around 50 incidents per 100,000, before slowly increasing to over 60 incidents per 100,000 persons. The recorded

rate of *other sexual offences*, on the other hand, fell back from 98.1 to around 80 incidents per 100,000 of population, whereupon it has remained relatively stable.

- ◆ A significant upward trend in the recorded rates of *robbery without a weapon* (up by 39%) and *robbery with a weapon not a firearm* (up by 37%). The upward trend, however, has been anything but uniform. The recorded rate of *robbery without a weapon* more than doubled between 1990 and 2001 but between 2001

and 2005 the recorded rate of this offence fell by 38 per cent, from 122.5 per 100,000 of population to 75.9 per 100,000 of population. A similar trend is also apparent for the offence of *robbery with a weapon not a firearm*. Between 1990 and 2001, the recorded rate of *robbery with a weapon not a firearm* almost tripled. Since 2001 however, the recorded rate of this offence has halved.

- ◆ A significant downward trend in the NSW rate of *robbery with a firearm* (down by 51%).

Figure 1: Murder rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2006

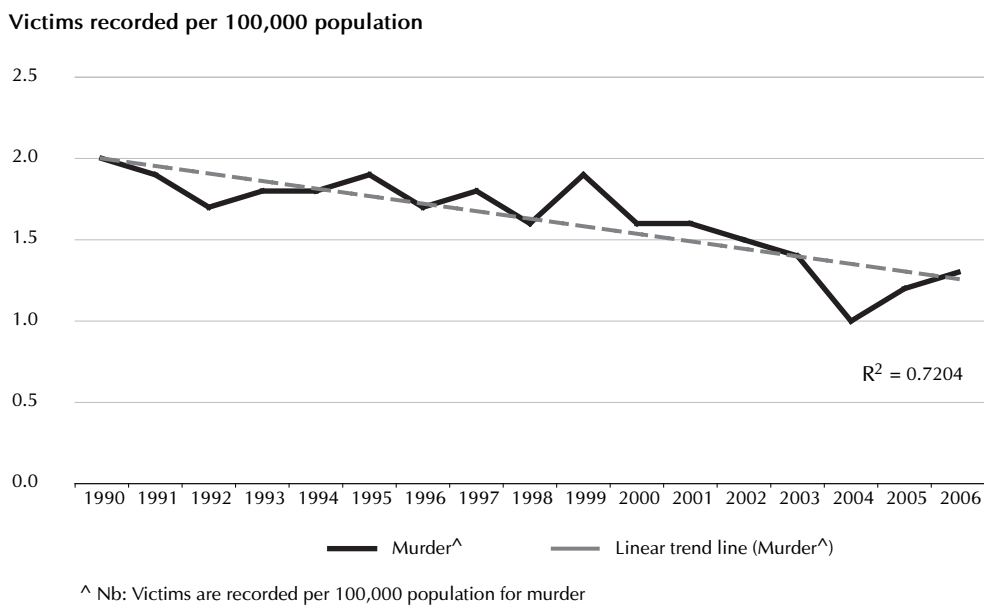


Figure 2: Assault rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2006

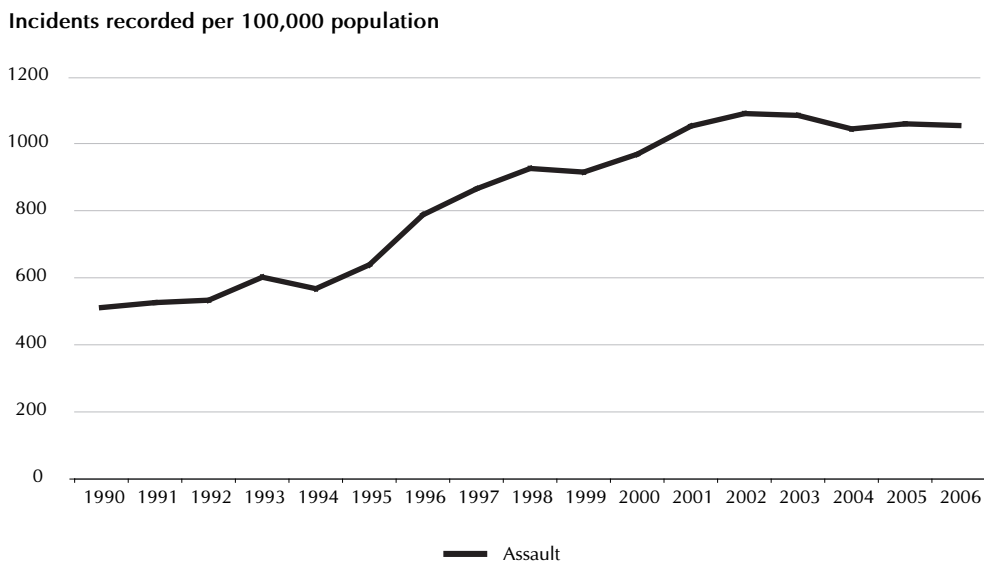


Figure 3: Sexual assault rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2006

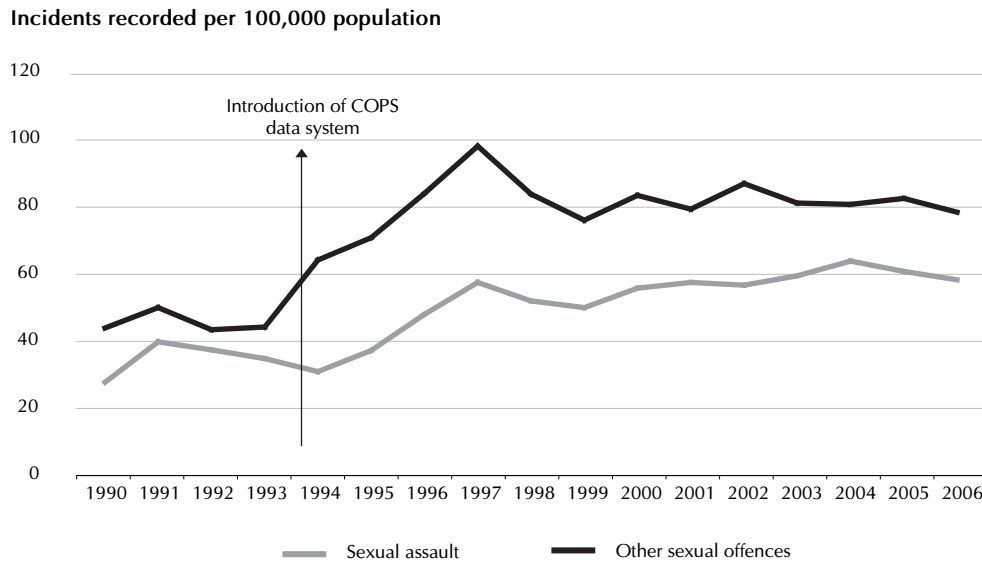
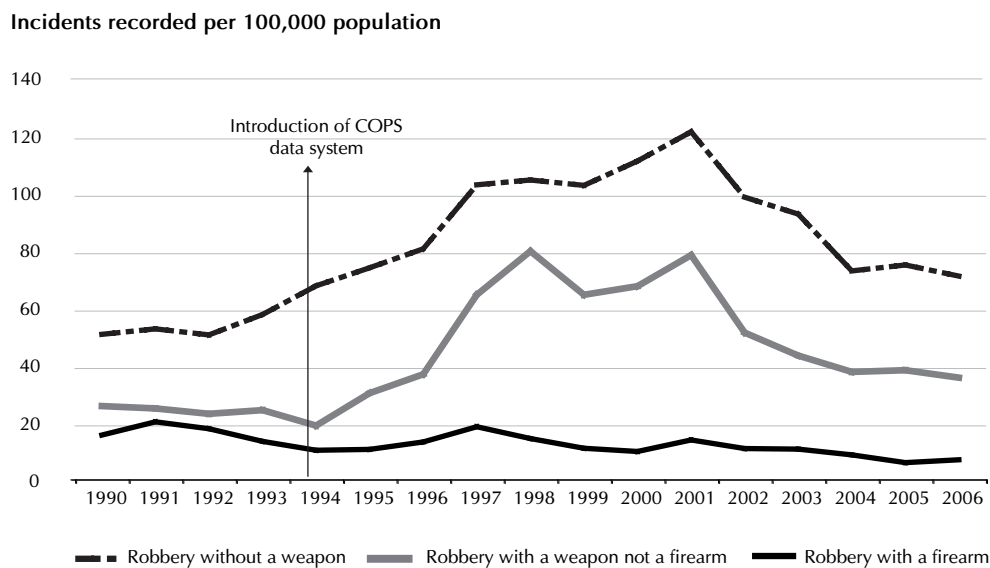


Figure 4: Robbery rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2006



PROPERTY CRIME

Figure 5 shows trends in the recorded rates of three major theft categories: *break and enter - dwelling*, *break and enter - non-dwelling* and *motor vehicle theft*. The major points to note from this figure are:

- ◆ A significant downward trend in recorded rates of *motor vehicle theft* (down by 55%) over the 17-year period. After a fall in this theft category in the early part of last decade the incident rate for *motor vehicle theft*

began to increase slightly from 1993 onwards. From about 1997, the rate of *motor vehicle theft* stabilised at around 800 incidents per 100,000 persons and then dropped sharply from 2001 onwards, falling by 49 per cent. Another point to note is the convergence between the rates of *motor vehicle theft* and *break and enter - non-dwelling*.

- ◆ Crime rates for burglary offences also fell slightly in the early part of last decade but from about 1993 onwards

began to increase. The increase was particularly marked in the case of *break and enter - non-dwelling*, which rose by 39 per cent between 1993 and 2001. From 2001 onwards, however, burglary offences began to fall sharply, with *break and enter - dwelling* falling by 42 per cent and *break and enter - non-dwelling* falling by 50 per cent. Although the overall trend was stable, recorded rates of burglary are now at their lowest levels for the 17 years of data available.

NOTES

1. The offence category 'other sexual offences' includes recorded incidents of indecent assault, acts of indecency and other sexual offences (e.g. wilful and obscene exposure, peep or pry).

REFERENCES

Moffatt & Poynton 2006, 'Long term trends in property and violent crime in NSW: 1990-2004', *Crime and Justice Bulletin*, no. 90, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Sydney.

Figure 5: Break and enter rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2006

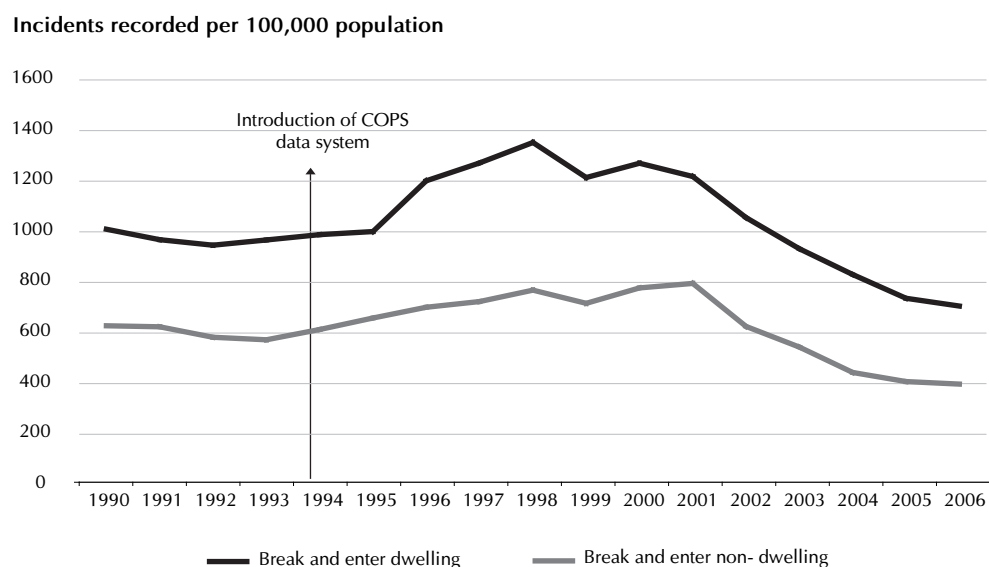
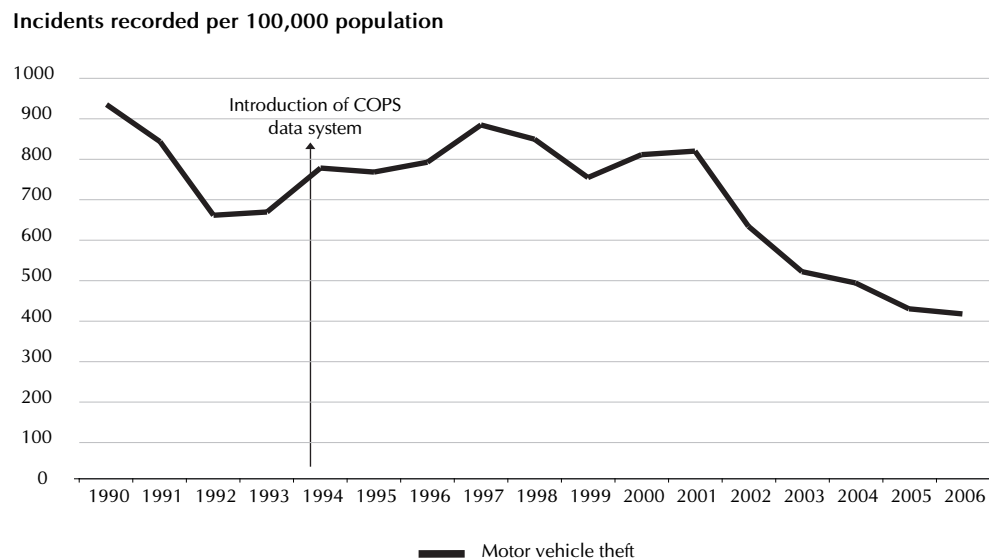


Figure 6: Motor vehicle theft rate for NSW per 100,000 population 1990-2006



APPENDIX

Table A1: Number of criminal incidents recorded by NSW Police by year and offence type

	<i>Murder[^]</i>	<i>Assault</i>	<i>Sexual assault</i>	<i>Other sexual offences</i>	<i>Robbery without a weapon</i>	<i>Robbery with a firearm</i>	<i>Robbery with a weapon not a firearm</i>	<i>Break and enter dwelling</i>	<i>Break and enter non-dwelling</i>	<i>Motor vehicle theft</i>
1990	119	29,776	1,606	2,552	3,022	981	1,568	58,862	36,639	54,488
1991	115	31,014	2,343	2,942	3,173	1,265	1,542	57,155	36,838	49,758
1992	101	31,773	2,220	2,583	3,080	1,132	1,444	56,437	34,754	39,423
1993	110	36,076	2,083	2,646	3,525	877	1,528	58,036	34,379	40,169
1994	83	25,732	1,397	2,908	3,120	522	912	44,850	27,858	35,304
1995	114	39,132	2,272	4,337	4,601	726	1,922	61,336	40,393	47,078
1996	106	48,869	2,973	5,211	5,067	892	2,359	74,546	43,551	49,187
1997	112	54,304	3,601	6,156	6,526	1,234	4,125	79,838	45,467	55,539
1998	100	58,672	3,291	5,310	6,700	987	5,130	85,768	48,772	53,851
1999	123	58,646	3,201	4,874	6,658	780	4,213	77,852	45,995	48,401
2000	103	62,797	3,615	5,408	7,284	722	4,459	82,427	50,470	52,624
2001	104	69,165	3,771	5,217	8,055	992	5,229	80,121	52,328	53,932
2002	97	72,279	3,758	5,763	6,614	805	3,486	70,042	41,523	42,078
2003	92	72,419	3,968	5,422	6,270	793	2,971	62,327	36,374	34,898
2004	69	70,122	4,291	5,426	4,973	666	2,609	55,853	29,833	33,234
2005	81	71,718	4,109	5,591	5,152	490	2,668	49,935	27,649	29,171
2006	90	71,373	3,944	5,313	4,890	554	2,491	47,863	26,981	28,304

Table A2: Number of criminal incidents recorded by NSW Police per 100,000 population by year and offence type

	<i>Murder[^]</i>	<i>Assault</i>	<i>Sexual assault</i>	<i>Other sexual offences</i>	<i>Robbery without a weapon</i>	<i>Robbery with a firearm</i>	<i>Robbery with a weapon not a firearm</i>	<i>Break and enter dwelling</i>	<i>Break and enter non-dwelling</i>	<i>Motor vehicle theft</i>
1990	2.0	511.0	27.6	43.8	51.9	16.8	26.9	1010.2	628.8	935.1
1991	1.9	525.8	39.7	49.9	53.8	21.4	26.1	968.9	624.5	843.5
1992	1.7	533.2	37.3	43.3	51.7	19.0	24.2	947.1	583.2	661.6
1993	1.8	601.5	34.7	44.1	58.8	14.6	25.5	967.7	573.2	669.8
1994	1.8	567.2	30.8	64.1	68.8	11.5	20.1	988.6	614.0	778.2
1995	1.9	638.7	37.1	70.8	75.1	11.8	31.4	1001.1	659.3	768.4
1996	1.7	787.6	47.9	84.0	81.7	14.4	38.0	1201.4	701.9	792.7
1997	1.8	865.1	57.4	98.1	104.0	19.7	65.7	1271.9	724.3	884.8
1998	1.6	925.6	51.9	83.8	105.7	15.6	80.9	1353.0	769.4	849.5
1999	1.9	914.7	49.9	76.0	103.8	12.2	65.7	1214.3	717.4	754.9
2000	1.6	968.2	55.7	83.4	112.3	11.1	68.7	1270.8	778.1	811.3
2001	1.6	1051.9	57.4	79.3	122.5	15.1	79.5	1218.5	795.8	820.2
2002	1.5	1089.5	56.6	86.9	99.7	12.1	52.5	1055.8	625.9	634.3
2003	1.4	1083.8	59.4	81.1	93.8	11.9	44.5	932.8	544.4	522.3
2004	1.0	1043.4	63.8	80.7	74.0	9.9	38.8	831.0	443.9	494.5
2005	1.2	1058.7	60.7	82.5	76.1	7.2	39.4	737.1	408.1	430.6
2006	1.3	1053.6	58.2	78.4	72.2	8.2	36.8	706.5	398.3	417.8

[^] For murder, the number shown is the number of recorded victims rather than criminal incidents