

Female offending: has there been an increase?

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'It's official: girl assault rates soar', Daily Telegraph, 7 February 2006
'Young, female and leading a crime wave', Daily Telegraph, 21 June 2008
'Increase in women charged with assault', AAP, 6 January 2010

There is increasing speculation that females are becoming more criminal and more violent. Using police person of interest (POI) data, this brief considers trends in offending by females and juvenile females over the 10 years to June 2009. Over this period, the number of females proceeded against by police increased by 15 per cent, whereas the number of male offenders remained stable. Female offenders were most likely to shoplift, commit non-domestic and domestic violence assault, fraud, and possess/use drugs. Female participation in specific offences changed over this time, with significantly more females being proceeded against for breaching judicial orders, committing assault, liquor offences and offensive behaviour as well as maliciously damaging property. Significantly fewer females were proceeded against for prostitution offences, robberies and thefts. The number of juvenile female offenders increased by more than a third whereas for juvenile males the increase was less than a tenth. Trends in offending by juvenile females mirrored those of all females, with the exception of shoplifting for which there was a significant rise in the number of juvenile female offenders but remained constant for female offenders in general. Notwithstanding these findings, females as well as juvenile females still continue to commit significantly fewer offences than their male counterparts.

INTRODUCTION

Despite, or perhaps because, females are in the minority among offenders, there is always interest in females who do offend as the headlines above reveal. Often the media, governments, academics and the general public speculate about whether females are becoming more criminal and particularly, more violent. While this brief considers trends in offending by females over the past 10 years by characterising the nature of their offending and exploring whether it has changed over time, explanations for any such changes are beyond this brief's scope.

Specifically, this brief aims to answer the following questions:

- Has there been a change in the number of female offenders over the past decade?
- Has the proportion of female offenders changed relative to male offenders?
- What offences were females most likely to commit?
- Has female participation in specific offences changed?
- Has offending among juvenile females changed?

METHOD

There are several sources of information about female offenders, including suspects recorded by the NSW Police Force in relation to recorded crime, defendants in the NSW Criminal Courts and self-reported crime involvement. To ensure all females coming into contact with the NSW Criminal Justice system are included in our examination, this brief uses NSW Police Force person of interest (POI) data.¹ Persons of interest are suspected offenders recorded by police in connection with criminal incidents. Some POIs are formally proceeded against by police either to court or by an alternative method such as by infringement notice or, for juveniles, by youth justice conference or formal caution. Many POIs however, do not have formal legal proceedings commenced against them; for example, when further police investigation deems the person is unlikely to have committed the offence. To ensure only POIs the police deem to be offenders are included in the analyses, the data in this brief is limited to POIs proceeded against by the police in some way.² Importantly, POIs are not a count of unique offenders. Where an individual is involved in multiple criminal incidents during

a given time period they are counted as a POI multiple times. Correspondingly, no POI information will be recorded for criminal incidents where there is no known suspect.

Offenders for all recorded criminal incidents except driving offences have been included for analysis. Only incidents where police recorded the offender's gender have been included.

One constraint in basing the present examination on police POI data is that it captures only a subset of actual offenders because some offenders go undetected. For this reason, it is likely to underestimate the number of actual offenders. Another limitation is that while some offences are more readily reported to police (for example, sexual offences, domestic violence assault and robbery), the police actively target or detect other offences (for example, drug offences, breach of judicial procedures, prostitution, offensive behaviour and assault police). As such, for many offences a recorded increase/decrease may be attributable to increased/decreased offending and/or increased/decreased police activity.

For simplicity, for the remainder of this brief 'POIs proceeded against by police' will be referred to as 'offenders'.

Investigation of changes in female participation in specific offences was limited to offences considered as major offences, those in the public spotlight, those having very large numbers of offenders or offences associated with females.

RESULTS

Over the 10 years to June 2009, 18 per cent of all offenders in NSW were female ($n=327,572$).

(a) Has there been a change in the number of female offenders over the past decade?

Yes. Figure 1 displays the number of female offenders over the 10 years to June 2009. During this period, the number of female offenders significantly increased by 15 per cent from 32,130 in 1999/00 to 36,818 in 2008/09 (an average increase of 1.5% per year). In contrast, over the same period, the number of male offenders remained statistically stable.⁴ Despite there being increasing numbers of female offenders, for each of these years there were many more male offenders compared to female offenders - for every female offender there were between 4.3 and 4.7 male offenders.

(b) Has the proportion of female offenders changed relative to male offenders?

Yes but only slightly. Figure 2 illustrates the proportion of female to male offenders for all offences in the 10 years to June 2009. The proportion of offences committed by female offenders accounted for between 17 and 19 per cent per year and although this proportion increased significantly over this time, it was only by 0.4 per cent each year (18.3% in 1999/00 compared to 19.0% in 2008/09).

(c) What offences were females most likely to commit?

The 10 offences with the highest number of female and male offenders between 1999/00 and 2008/09 are provided in Table 1. Female offenders were most likely to shoplift (49,251 females or 15% of all female offenders), commit non-domestic violence assault (28,101 females or 9% of all female offenders), fraud (23,599 females or 7% of all female offenders), possess/use drugs (21,598 females or 7% of all female offenders) and commit domestic violence assault (16,836 females or 5% of all female offenders).

Figure 1. Number of female offenders, NSW, July 1999 to June 2009

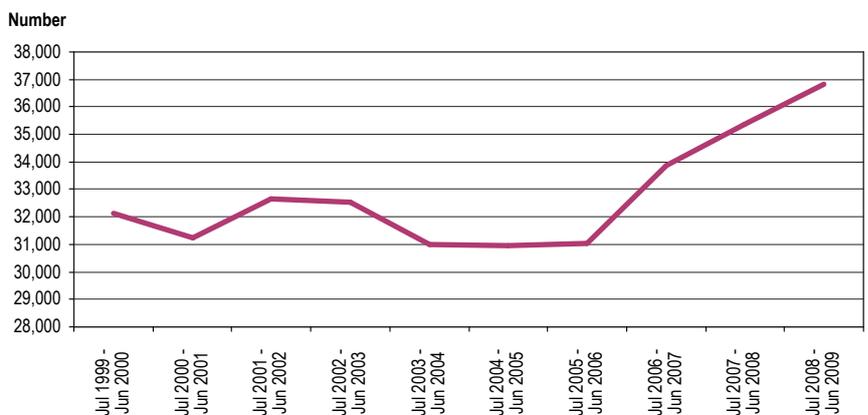


Figure 2. Percentage of female and male offenders, NSW, July 1999 to June 2009

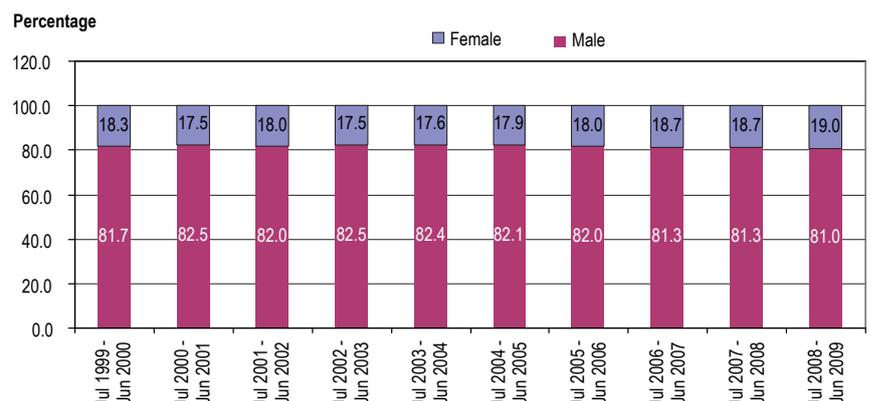


Table 1. Top 10 offences with the highest number of female and male offenders, NSW, July 1999 to June 2009

Offence	Female		Offence	Male	
	% of all female offenders	No.		% of all male offenders	No.
Shoplifting	15.0	49,251	Domestic violence assault	8.1	119,896
Non domestic violence assault	8.6	28,101	Possession and/or use of drugs ^a	8.0	118,371
Fraud	7.2	23,599	Non domestic violence assault	7.1	105,566
Possession and/or use of drugs ^a	6.6	21,598	Malicious damage to property	7.0	103,285
Domestic violence assault	5.1	16,836	Offensive behaviour ^b	4.9	72,641
Malicious damage to property	5.0	16,476	Breach AVO	4.7	70,123
Offensive behaviour ^b	4.8	15,574	Shoplifting	4.1	60,331
Breach bail conditions	3.2	10,516	Breach bail conditions	3.8	56,642
Resist or hinder officer	3.1	10,159	Resist or hinder officer	3.5	51,234
Liquor offences	2.8	9,242	Fraud	2.8	41,367

a Drugs include cocaine, narcotics, cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy and other drugs

b Includes offensive conduct and offensive language

Over the same time, male offenders were most likely to commit domestic violence assault (119,896 males or 8% of all male offenders), possess/use drugs (118,371 males or 8% of all male offenders), commit non-domestic violence assault (105,566 males or 7% of all male offenders), maliciously damage property (103,285 males or 7% of all male offenders) and commit offensive behaviour (72,641 males or 5% of all male offenders).

Importantly, it should be noted that for all offences included in this analysis there were many more male offenders than female ones. Even for shoplifting, the most prevalent offence committed by females, there were 22 per cent more male offenders than female ones.

(d) Has female participation in specific offences changed?⁵

Yes for some offences.

Trends in female offending

Table 2 shows the number and average annual percentage change over 10 years of female and male offenders for selected offences. As can be seen from this table, the number of female and male offenders changed at different rates for the same offences over the 10 years to June 2009.

The number of female and male offenders increased significantly for the following offences: breach of bail conditions (up 14% each year for females and 11% for males), domestic violence assault (up 12% each year for females and 4% for males), breach of apprehended violence orders (AVOs) (up 6% each year for females and 2% for males) and malicious damage to property (up 4% each year for both females and males). For these offences the increase in the number of female offenders was greater than or the same as for males.

Other offences which showed a significant increase in the number of both female and male offenders were liquor offences (up 8% each year for females and 11% for males) and offensive behaviour (up 3% each year for females and 5% for males), however for these offences, the average annual increase for male offenders was greater than that for females.

In addition to the above offences, there were significant increases in the number of female offenders who assaulted police, resisted/hindered officers, committed non-domestic violence assault (all up 2% each year) and dealt/trafficked drugs (up 1% each year). In contrast, the number of male offenders committing these offences remained stable or decreased.

Over the same time period, the number of female and male offenders decreased significantly for motor vehicle theft (down 12% each year for females and 10% for males), steal from dwellings (down 10% each year for females and 9% for males), fraud (down 9% each year for females and 7% for males), burglary of non-dwellings (down 9% each year for females and 8% for males), robbery with a weapon not a firearm (down 8% each year for females and 7% for males), steal from motor vehicles (down 7% each year for females and males) and burglary of dwellings (down 6% each year for females and 4% for males). As such, for each of these offences, the decrease in the number of female offenders was either the same or more than that for males.

Of importance, for prostitution offences, commonly believed to be committed mostly by females⁶, the number of female offenders significantly decreased over the decade ending June 2009 (down 15% each year). This offence however is influenced heavily by police enforcement actions such as targets and blitzes. Therefore the decreasing number of female offenders proceeded against by police in the present analysis could be a reflection of policing.

Table 2. Female and male offenders for selected offences: number and trends, NSW, July 1999 to June 2009

Offence	FEMALE OFFENDERS			MALE OFFENDERS		
	No. in 99/00	No. in 08/09	10 year trend and av. annual % change	No. in 99/00	No. in 08/09	10 year trend and av. annual % change
Breach bail conditions	513	1,601	13.5	3,209	7,856	10.5
Domestic violence assault	941	2,552	11.7	9,696	13,523	3.8
Liquor offences	700	1,419	8.2	2,327	6,140	11.4
Breach AVO	673	1,121	5.8	6,286	7,476	1.9
Malicious damage to property	1,362	2,013	4.4	8,973	12,412	3.7
Offensive behaviour ^a	1,573	1,991	2.7	6,841	10,474	4.8
Assault police	540	661	2.3	2,079	1,904	-1.0
Resist or hinder officer	946	1,151	2.2	5,207	5,538	Stable
Non domestic violence assault	2,624	3,078	1.8	10,988	10,186	-0.8
Dealing, trafficking in drugs ^b	428	476	1.2	1,896	1,803	-0.6
Robbery without a weapon	180	204	Stable	1,300	1,170	-1.2
Shoplifting	5,176	5,435	Stable	7,149	5,447	-3.0
Steal from person	156	160	Stable	511	406	-2.5
Possession and/or use of drugs ^b	2,341	2,594	Stable	12,352	13,653	Stable
Burglary of dwellings	717	413	-5.9	4,675	3,149	-4.3
Steal from motor vehicle	226	124	-6.5	2,445	1,409	-5.9
Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	119	54	-8.4	1,091	590	-6.6
Burglary of non-dwellings	366	163	-8.6	4,180	1,926	-8.2
Fraud	3,990	1,699	-9.1	5,810	3,027	-7.0
Steal from dwelling	393	153	-10.0	1,643	713	-8.9
Motor vehicle theft	568	183	-11.8	4,274	1,630	-10.2
Prostitution offences	154	37	-14.7	49	34	nc
Murder	8	6	nc	77	54	Stable
Sexual assault	5	16	nc	1,023	631	-5.2
Indecent assault, act of indecency and other sexual offences	7	21	nc	1,567	1,203	-2.9
Robbery with a firearm	7	10	nc	207	164	-2.6
Pornography offences	-	-	nc	25	11	nc

Note. The trend shows the results of a statistical test for significant upward or downward trends in the number of offenders over a 10 year period. The trend test used is Kendall's rank-order correlation test. Where the trend is significant (i.e $p < .05$) the average annual percentage change over the 10 year period is shown. Significant upward trends are highlighted in red; significant downward trends are highlighted in blue. A non-significant test result is denoted by 'Stable' and 'nc' indicates that the number of offenders recorded was too small for a reliable trend test to be performed.

a Includes offensive conduct and offensive language

b Drugs include cocaine, narcotics, cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy and other drugs

Overall, the number of female offenders increased significantly for 10 of the 27 offences examined, whereas the number of male offenders increased significantly for 6 offences. Also, the number of female offenders decreased significantly for 8 offences whereas the number of male offenders decreased significantly for 16 offences.

Moreover, for two offences against justice procedures and for one violent offence, the increase in the number of female offenders was greater than the increase for males. Furthermore, for another two violent offences, an additional offence against justice procedures as well as drug dealing, the number of female offenders increased significantly but for males the number either decreased or remained stable.

Female offenders as a proportion of all offenders by offence

Table 3⁷ shows the offences with the highest and lowest female participation. The offences with large proportions of female offenders were prostitution offences (49% of all offenders), shoplifting (45% of all offenders), fraud (36% of all offenders), stealing from persons and assaulting police (each 25% of all offenders).

In contrast, male offenders were almost entirely responsible for sexual assault (98% of all offenders), indecent assault, acts of indecency and other sexual offences (98% of all offenders), robbery with a firearm (96% of all offenders), burglary of non-dwellings and stealing from motor vehicles (each 93% of all offenders).

Table 3. Top 10 offences with the highest proportion of female and male offenders, NSW, July 1999 to June 2009

Offence	% Female	Offence	% Male
Prostitution offences	49.0	Sexual assault	98.3
Shoplifting	44.9	Indecent assault, act of indecency and other sexual offences	98.0
Fraud	36.3	Robbery with a firearm	95.7
Steal from person	24.8	Burglary of non-dwellings	92.8
Assault police	24.5	Steal from motor vehicle	92.6
Non domestic violence assault	21.0	Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	90.2
Liquor offences	19.9	Breach AVO	88.6
Steal from dwelling	19.1	Motor vehicle theft	88.4
Dealing, trafficking in drugs ^a	18.4	Burglary of dwellings	87.8
Offensive behaviour ^b	17.7	Domestic violence assault	87.7

a Drugs include cocaine, narcotics, cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy and other drugs

b Includes offensive conduct and offensive language

While Table 2 shows the change in female offending by offence since 1999/00 and Table 3 illustrates the offences with the largest proportion of female offenders, neither of these analyses address whether the proportion of female offenders committing specific offences significantly changed from 1999/00 to 2008/09. To explore this issue, 2x2 chi-squared tests were carried out. Using the offences listed in Table 2, changes in the proportion of female and male offenders in 1999/00 were compared to 2008/09.⁸ Offences where there were significant differences over the 10 years ending June 2009 are shown in Figures 3 and 4 (for all offences in these two Figures $p \leq .05$).

Figures 3 and 4 show offences for which the proportion of female offenders has significantly changed since 1999/00. Figure 3 shows females accounted for a significantly larger proportion of offenders who shoplifted, committed domestic and non-domestic violence assault, assaulted police and breached AVOs and their bail conditions in 2008/09 than in 1999/00. In contrast, Figure 4 illustrates those offences where the proportion of female offenders decreased. Proportions of female offenders in 2008/09 were lower for fraud, liquor offences, offensive behaviour and burglary of dwellings, compared to 1999/00.

For the offences of malicious damage to property, possession/use of drugs, burglary of non-dwellings, motor vehicle theft and stealing from motor vehicles, dwellings and persons, there

Figure 3. Offences where the proportion of female offenders significantly increased, NSW, 1999/00 and 2008/09

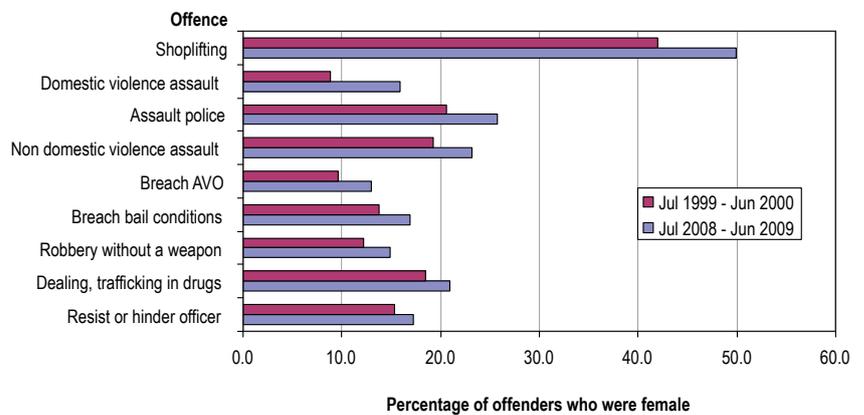
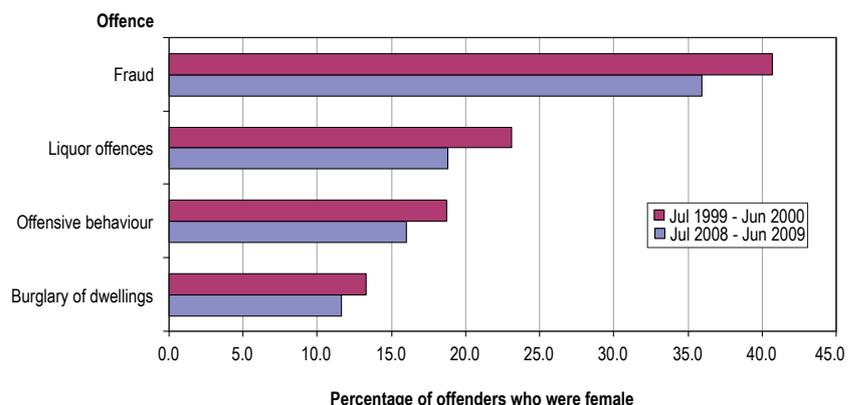


Figure 4. Offences where the proportion of female offenders significantly decreased, NSW, 1999/00 and 2008/09



were no changes in the proportions of female offenders from 1999/00 to 2008/09.

In summary, these results when taken together suggest that more females offended, that the offences they committed were of a more violent nature or were against justice procedures more often than was the case a decade ago.

e) Has offending among juvenile⁹ females changed?

Yes. Figure 5 displays the number of juvenile female offenders over the 10 years to June 2009. While the number of both juvenile female and male offenders increased significantly over this period, for juvenile females, the increase was 36 per cent (from 6,528 in 1999/00 to 8,901 in 2008/09) whereas for juvenile males the increase was 8 per cent (from 27,383 in 1999/00 to 29,664 in 2008/09).

Juvenile females as a proportion of all juvenile offenders

Figure 6 illustrates the proportion of offenders from the last 10 years that were juvenile females and males. In line with the proportion of female offenders generally, juvenile female offenders accounted for between 19 and 23 per cent of all juvenile offenders each year from 1999/00 to 2008/09. On average, the proportion of juvenile female offenders increased significantly by 2 per cent each year over this time. Despite this, for each of these years there were many more juvenile male offenders compared to juvenile female offenders - for every juvenile female offender there were between 3.3 and 4.3 juvenile male offenders.

Offences most likely to be committed by juvenile female offenders

The 10 offences with the highest number of juvenile female and male offenders for the period from 1999/00 to 2008/09

Figure 5. Number of juvenile female offenders, NSW July 1999 to June 2009

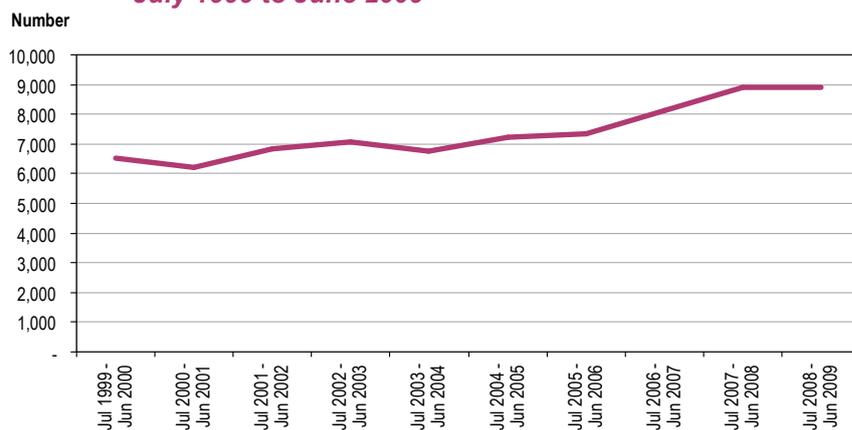
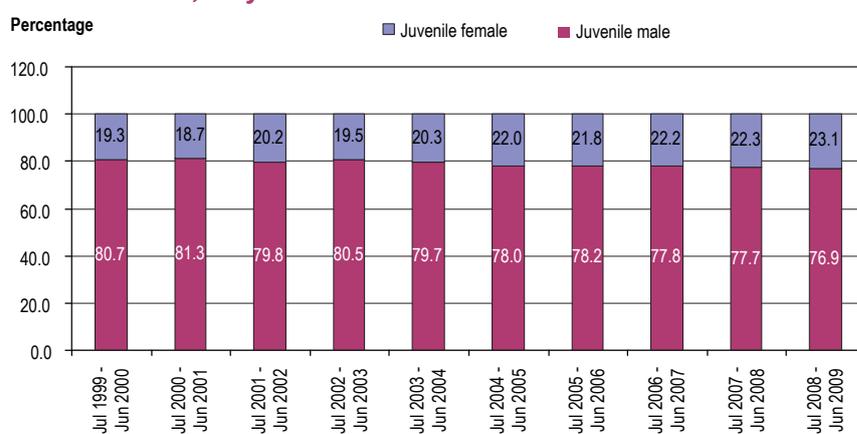


Figure 6. Percentage of juvenile female and male offenders, NSW, July 1999 to June 2009



are provided in Table 4. Like female offenders, juvenile female offenders were most likely to shoplift (15,701 juvenile females or 21% of all juvenile female offenders), commit non-domestic violence assault (8,035 juvenile females or 11% of all juvenile female offenders), liquor offences (4,698 juvenile females or 6%

Table 4. Top 10 offences with the highest number of juvenile female and male offenders, NSW, July 1999 to June 2009

Offence	Juvenile females		Offence	Juvenile males	
	% of all juvenile female offenders	No.		% of all juvenile male offenders	No.
Shoplifting	21.2	15,701	Malicious damage to property	10.4	28,802
Non domestic violence assault	10.9	8,035	Non domestic violence assault	7.1	19,808
Liquor offences	6.4	4,698	Breach bail conditions	6.6	18,303
Malicious damage to property	6.2	4,609	Shoplifting	6.4	17,758
Breach bail conditions	4.9	3,630	Burglary of non-dwellings	5.3	14,700
Offensive behaviour ^a	3.1	2,272	Liquor offences	4.7	12,975
Possession and/or use of drugs ^b	2.5	1,853	Burglary of dwellings	4.6	12,670
Domestic violence assault	2.5	1,843	Motor vehicle theft	4.3	12,039
Motor vehicle theft	2.3	1,707	Possession and/or use of drugs ^b	3.6	10,132
Resist or hinder officer	2.3	1,672	Steal from motor vehicle	2.7	7,425

^a Includes offensive conduct and offensive language

^b Drugs include cocaine, narcotics, cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy and other drugs

of all juvenile female offenders), maliciously damage property (4,609 juvenile females or 6% of all juvenile female offenders) and breach their bail conditions (3,630 juvenile females or 5% of all juvenile female offenders).

Over the same time, juvenile male offenders were most likely to maliciously damage property (28,802 juvenile males or 10% of all juvenile male offenders), commit non-domestic violence assault (19,808 juvenile males or 7% of all juvenile male offenders), breach their bail conditions (18,303 juvenile males or 7% of all juvenile male offenders), shoplift (17,758 juvenile males or 6% of all juvenile male offenders) and burgle non-dwellings (14,700 juvenile males or 5% of all juvenile male offenders).

Despite this, for all offences included in this analysis, the number of juvenile male offenders exceeded the number of juvenile female offenders, with the exception of prostitution offences.¹⁰

Trends in offending by juvenile females

Table 5 displays the changes in the number of juvenile female and male offenders over the 10 years ending June 2009 by offence. Over the last decade, the trends in offending by juvenile females mirrored those of female offenders in general, with the exception of shoplifting which showed significant increases in the number of juvenile female offenders (up 1% each year) but remained constant for all female offenders. The number of juvenile female and male offenders increased

Table 5. Juvenile female and male offenders for selected offences: number and trends, NSW, July 1999 to June 2009

Offence	Juvenile female offenders			Juvenile male offenders		
	No. in 99/00	No. in 08/09	10 year trend and av. annual % change	No. in 99/00	No. in 08/09	10 year trend and av. annual % change
Domestic violence assault	65	319	19.3	319	773	10.3
Breach bail conditions	203	629	13.4	1,178	2,515	8.8
Breach AVOs	54	129	10.2	205	342	5.9
Malicious damage to property	338	619	7.0	2,452	3,809	5.0
Non domestic violence assault	720	989	3.6	1,999	2,004	Stable
Liquor offences	421	535	2.7	1,141	1,113	Stable
Shoplifting	1,591	1,754	1.1	1,924	1,774	-0.9
Robbery without a weapon	109	136	Stable	638	552	Stable
Steal from motor vehicle	50	35	Stable	919	662	-3.6
Assault police	86	105	Stable	244	244	Stable
Resist or hinder officer	156	173	Stable	751	730	Stable
Steal from person	51	45	-1.4	161	119	-3.3
Offensive behaviour ^a	294	211	-3.6	826	693	Stable
Steal from dwelling	66	47	-3.7	479	265	-6.4
Burglary of dwellings	226	157	-4.0	1,410	1,215	Stable
Fraud	244	164	-4.3	372	259	-3.9
Possession and/or use of drugs ^b	243	160	-4.5	1,299	940	-3.5
Burglary of non-dwellings	176	94	-6.7	2,050	931	-8.4
Motor vehicle theft	234	97	-9.3	1,799	775	-8.9
Murder	-	-	nc	3	7	nc
Sexual assault	1	-	nc	90	101	Stable
Indecent assault, act of indecency and other sexual offences	1	2	nc	109	90	Stable
Robbery with a firearm	-	2	nc	34	38	nc
Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	48	18	nc	320	198	-5.2
Dealing, trafficking in drugs ^b	24	5	nc	116	81	-3.9
Pornography offences	-	-	nc	1	-	nc
Prostitution offences	3	1	nc	1	-	nc

Note. The trend shows the results of a statistical test for significant upward or downward trends in the number of offenders over a 10 year period. The trend test used is Kendall's rank-order correlation test. Where the trend is significant (i.e $p < .05$) the average annual percentage change over the 10 year period is shown. Significant upward trends are highlighted in red; significant downward trends are highlighted in blue. A non-significant test result is denoted by 'Stable' and 'nc' indicates that the number of offenders recorded was too small for a reliable trend test to be performed.

a Includes offensive conduct and offensive language

b Drugs include cocaine, narcotics, cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy and other drugs

Table 6. Top 10 offences with the highest proportion of juvenile female and male offenders, NSW, July 1999 to June 2009

Offence	% juvenile female	Offence	% juvenile male
Shoplifting	46.9	Sexual assault	98.2
Fraud	35.6	Indecent assault, act of indecency and other sexual offences	97.0
Assault police	32.9	Steal from motor vehicle	94.3
Non domestic violence assault	28.9	Burglary of non-dwellings	92.6
Liquor offences	26.6	Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	89.3
Domestic violence assault	26.1	Burglary of dwellings	88.6
Offensive behaviour ^a	25.6	Motor vehicle theft	87.6
Breach AVO	24.1	Malicious damage to property	86.2
Steal from person	23.4	Steal from dwelling	84.8
Resist or hinder officer	20.5	Possession and/or use of drugs ^b	84.5

a Includes offensive conduct and offensive language

b Drugs include cocaine, narcotics, cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy and other drugs

significantly for domestic violence assault (up 19% each year for juvenile females and 10% for juvenile males), breach of bail conditions (up 13% each year for juvenile females and 9% for juvenile males) and AVOs (up 10% each year for juvenile females and 6% for juvenile males) as well as for malicious damage to property offences (up 7% each year for juvenile females and 5% for juvenile males). For each of these offences, the increase in the number of juvenile female offenders was greater than that for juvenile males.

In addition, there were significant increases in the number of juvenile females who committed non-domestic violence assault (up 4% each year), liquor offences (up 3% each year) and shoplifted (up 1% each year) whereas the number of juvenile males committing these offences remained stable or decreased.

Over the same time period, the number of juvenile female and male offenders decreased significantly for motor vehicle theft (down 9% each year for juvenile females and males), burglary of non-dwellings (down 7% each year for juvenile females and 8% for juvenile males), drug possession/use (down 5% each year for juvenile females and 4% for juvenile males), steal from dwellings (down 4% each year for juvenile females and 6% for juvenile males), fraud (down 4% each year for both juvenile females and males) as well as for stealing from persons (down 1% each year for juvenile females and 3% for juvenile males).

In addition, there were significant decreases in the number of juvenile females who committed offensive behaviour and burgled dwellings (both down 4% each year) whereas the number of juvenile males committing these offences remained stable.

Overall, the number of juvenile female offenders increased significantly for 7 of the 27 offences examined, whereas the number of juvenile male offenders increased significantly for 4 offences. Also, the number of juvenile female offenders

decreased significantly for 8 offences however the number of juvenile male offenders decreased significantly for 10 offences.

Juvenile female offenders as a proportion of all juvenile offenders by offence

Table 6 illustrates those offences with the highest proportion of juvenile female and male offenders.¹¹ In line with female offenders, of all juvenile offenders over the last decade, the offences with the greatest proportion of juvenile female offenders were shoplifting (47% of all juvenile offenders), fraud (36% of all juvenile offenders), assault police (33% of all juvenile offenders), non-domestic violence assault (29% of all juvenile offenders) as well as liquor offences (27% of all juvenile offenders).

Similar to male offenders, juvenile males accounted for almost all sexual assaults (98% of all offenders), indecent assaults, acts of indecency and other sexual offences (97% of all offenders), stealing from motor vehicles (94% of all offenders), burglary of non-dwellings (93% of all offenders) and robberies with a weapon not a firearm (89% of all offenders).

With regard to whether the proportion of juvenile female offenders for specific offences significantly differed from 1999/00 to 2008/09, a series of chi-squared tests were carried out. Of the offences investigated,¹² only those included in Figure 7 yielded significant differences in the proportion of juvenile female offenders in 1999/00 and 2008/09 (for all offences in Figure 7 $p \leq .05$).

Figure 7 shows that in 2008/09 significantly larger proportions of juvenile females committed non-domestic violence assault, liquor offences, breached their bail conditions, committed robbery without a weapon, shoplifted and maliciously damaged property than was the case a decade before.

There were no offences for which the proportion of juvenile female offenders significantly decreased.

Figure 7. Offences where the proportion of juvenile female offenders significantly increased, NSW, 1999/00 and 2008/09

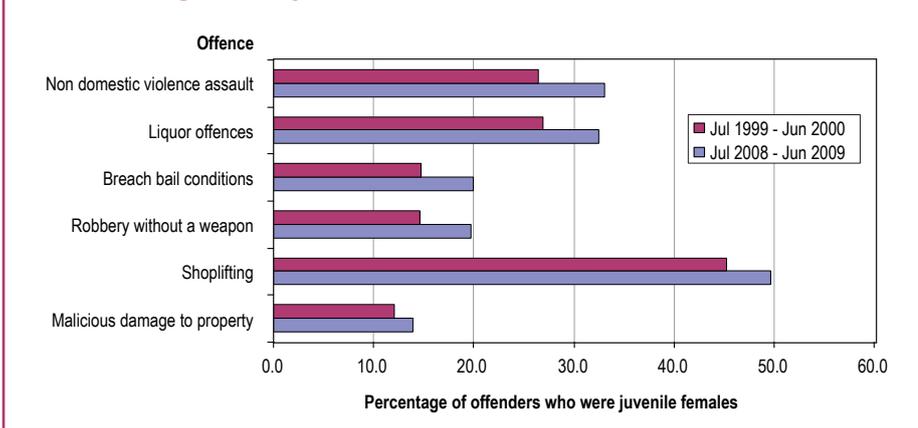
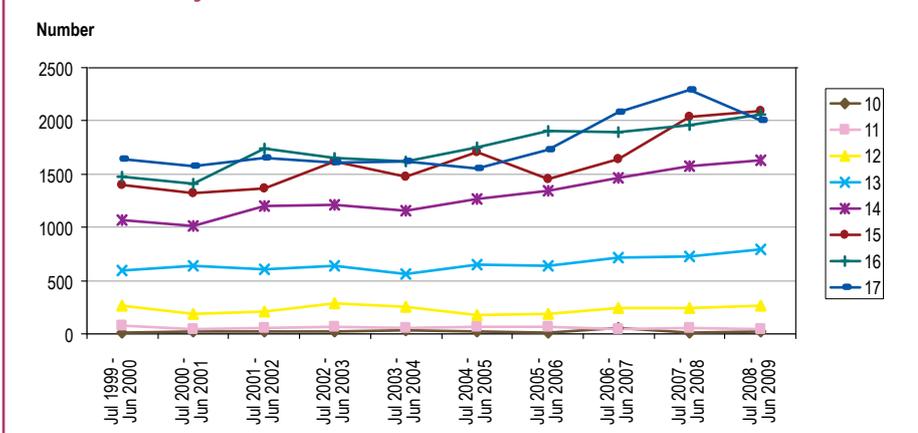


Figure 8. Juvenile female offenders by single years of age, NSW, July 1999 to June 2009



For the offences of resist/hinder officer, offensive behaviour, possession/use of drugs, burglary of dwellings and fraud, there were no changes in the proportions of juvenile female offenders from 1999/00 to 2008/09.

Are younger or older juvenile females committing crimes?

Figure 8 shows the number of juvenile female offenders by age. Across all years from 1999/00 to 2008/09, there were significantly higher numbers of older juvenile females offending than younger ones. In addition, offending by juvenile females aged 13 to 17 years increased significantly (on average, up 3% each year for 13-year-old females, up 5% each year for both 14- and 15-year-old females, up 4% each year for 16-year-old females and up 2% each year for 17-year-old females). The number of 11- and 12-year-old females offending remained constant over this time and there were too few 10-year-old female offenders to carry out a statistical trend test.

CONCLUSION

The current brief aimed to describe the trends in female offending by characterising the nature of their offending and also exploring whether it has changed over the past decade. Four research questions were posed: (a) whether there has

been a change in the number of female offenders; (b) whether the proportion of female offenders changed relative to male offenders; (c) which offences were females most likely to commit; (d) whether female participation in specific offences changed; and (e) whether offending among juvenile females changed?

In relation to (a), although just under 20 per cent of all offenders were female, the number of females offending increased by 15 per cent over the last decade (on average, up 1.5% per year), whereas the number of male offenders remained statistically stable. With regard to (b), the proportion of female offenders increased significantly but only by 0.4 per cent each year.

In relation to (c), between 1999/00 and 2008/09 female offenders were most likely to shoplift, commit non-domestic and domestic violence assault, fraud, and possess/use drugs. However for all offences included in this analysis there were many more male offenders than female ones and this was the case even for shoplifting, which was the most prevalent offence committed by females.

With reference to (d), female participation in specific offences did change over this time for some offences. The number of female offenders increased significantly for 10 of the 27 offences examined, whereas the number of male offenders increased significantly for 6 offences. Also, the number of female offenders decreased significantly for 8 offences whereas the number of male offenders decreased significantly for 16 offences.

Moreover, for two offences against justice procedures (breach bail conditions and breach AVOs) and for one violent offence (domestic violent assault), the increase in the number of female offenders was greater than the increase for males. Furthermore, for another two violent offences (non-domestic violence assault and assault police), an additional offence against justice procedures (resist/hinder officer), and drug dealing, the number of female offenders increased significantly but for males the number either decreased or remained stable.

Compared to 1999/00, females in 2008/09 increased their proportionate participation for shoplifting, breach AVOs and breach bail conditions as well as the more violent offences of domestic and non-domestic violence assault and assault police. However, they reduced their proportionate participation in fraud, liquor offences, offensive behaviour and burglary of dwellings. Importantly, for all offences except prostitution, females were still a minority of offenders.

With regard to part (e), the pattern of offending for juvenile females was in line with that of females generally. Over the decade, the number of juvenile female offenders increased by more than a third whereas for juvenile males the increase was less than a tenth. The proportion of juvenile female offenders increased significantly by 2 per cent each year over this time, which was at a faster rate than for all female offenders. Trends in offending by juvenile females mirrored those of all females, with the exception of shoplifting for which there was a significant rise in the number of juvenile female offenders but remained constant for female offenders in general. For violent offences such as domestic and non-domestic assault as well as for offences against justice procedures including breach of AVOs and bail conditions, the increase in juvenile female offenders was significantly greater than that for juvenile males; for several theft offences (except shoplifting) however the drop in the number of juvenile female offenders was larger than that for juvenile males.

Compared to 10 years ago, juvenile females significantly increased their proportionate participation in six offences yet there were no offences for which their proportionate participation significantly dropped. The increase in offences by juvenile females was restricted to those aged 13 to 17.

Despite these findings, there were two limitations to this study. The first is that because many offenders are likely to go undetected, POI data is an imperfect measure of actual offending. The second limitation is that for many offences it cannot be definitively concluded whether a recorded increase/decrease is attributable to increased/decreased offending or increased/decreased police targeting and activity.

Notwithstanding such limitations inherent in all studies using police POI data, the findings of the present brief suggest that the nature of female offending has changed over the past 10 years. The number and proportion of females and juvenile females offending has increased significantly and there has been an elevation in the severity of the offences they committed. These findings suggest that females and juvenile females are committing more violent offences than they did 10 years ago. Despite these findings, it is important to note that females as well as juvenile females still continue to commit significantly fewer offences than their male counterparts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

- 1 Data up to June 2009 from the NSW Police Force's Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) extract.
- 2 Includes proceeded against to court by way of Court Attendance Notice or proceeded against other than to court by way of Youth Justice Conference, Caution Young Offenders Act, Cannabis Caution, Other Drug Caution, Criminal Infringement Notice or Infringement Notice. POIs proceeded against by way of a warning or where the method of legal proceeding was not further classified are not included in this analysis due to changes in police recording practices for these categories in 2008.
- 3 Driving offences were excluded because from December 2000, NSW Police started recording the issuing of infringement notices to offenders committing driving offences. Prior to this date however, this method of proceeding against an offender was not recorded.
- 4 There were 143,208 male offenders in 1999/00 and 156,657 in 2008/09 however this increase was not statistically significant when Kendall's rank-order correlation test was applied.
- 5 The offences included in the analyses for section (d) are limited to those listed in Table 2. These are offences the author considers to be major offences, ones in the public spotlight, those having very large numbers of offenders or which are associated with females.
- 6 In the present analysis however 49 per cent of prostitution offenders were female from July 1999 to June 2009.
- 7 Offences with less than 40 offenders (male and female combined) in any financial year from July 1999 to June 2009 were excluded because small changes in offender numbers result in very large changes in the corresponding proportions.
- 8 Offences with less than 100 female offenders in financial years of 1999/2000 or 2008/09 were excluded from the chi-squared analyses because small changes in offender numbers result in very large changes in the corresponding proportions.
- 9 In this brief 'juveniles' are aged from 10 years (the age of criminal responsibility in NSW) to 17 years at the time of the offence.
- 10 For prostitution there were 15 juvenile female offenders and 5 juvenile male offenders between 1999/00 and 2008/09.
- 11 Excluded from this table are offences with less than 40 offenders (male and female combined) in any financial year from July 1999 to June 2009 because small changes in offender numbers result in very large changes in the corresponding proportions.
- 12 Offences listed in Table 5 with less than 100 juvenile female offenders in financial years of 1999/2000 or 2008/09 were excluded from the chi-squared analyses because small changes in offender numbers result in very large changes in the corresponding proportions.