

## ASSAULTS ON SCHOOL PREMISES IN NSW, 2005 – 2009

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**Aim:** To examine the characteristics of, and trends in, police-recorded assault incidents involving school-aged children on school premises in NSW.

**Method:** The sample consisted of all incidents of assault recorded by NSW police officers as having occurred on school premises between 2005 and 2009. The police-recorded free-text narratives of a random sample of 300 incidents which occurred in 2009 were examined to determine the type of victim and offender involved and the location on the school premises where the incident occurred.

**Results:** Over the five years, there was a statistically significant upward trend in the rate of recorded assault incidents between school-aged children on government school premises during school hours. The typical assault occurred in the afternoon in a government secondary school, involved two students of the same gender (generally boys), aged between 13 and 15 years, involved no weapon and no injury or only minor injuries to the victim. Most offenders were not charged with an offence. The most common locations for incidents were either the playground/oval or school corridors/staircases/toilet blocks/gymnasium.

**Conclusion:** While the upward trend in assaults on school premises may be due to an actual increase in assaults, there is also reason to believe that, in recent years, schools have been much more likely to report assaults to police.

**Keywords:** school, assaults, police, trends

### INTRODUCTION

In mid-February 2010, a 12-year old school boy was fatally stabbed allegedly by another school student in a Queensland non-government school. More recently, the Deputy State Coroner in NSW concluded that '[bullying at school and on the internet] played a significant role in [a 14-year-old boy's] decision to take his own life' (Howden, 17 June 2010). As would be expected, these events re-ignited concerns in both the general community and the media (e.g. Horin, 22 February 2010; Tarica, 22 February 2010) about the extent of violence on school premises, the safety of school students and the effectiveness of violence-prevention strategies.

The subject of violence on school premises is naturally an emotive one. However, the evidence suggests that schools are relatively safe. For example, in an earlier study, Trimboli and Bonney (1994) found that, over the three-year period from 1990 to 1992, the rate of police-recorded assaults on school grounds in NSW was very low, being 42 assaults per 100,000 enrolled students. By contrast, in the general community, the rate of recorded incidents of aggravated and non-aggravated

assault over this time period was considerably higher, being, respectively, 16 and 20 times higher than the school rate. The researchers found that most assaults between students on school premises occurred in government schools, in the playground, during school hours, particularly at lunchtime. The typical assault involved one victim and one offender of the same gender and of similar age, and resulted in either no injury or only minor injuries to the victim.

### AIM

The main purpose of the current study was to update the earlier research. More specifically, the key aims of the current study were:

1. to describe the characteristics of police-recorded incidents of alleged assault involving school-aged children on school premises in NSW during school hours (i.e. between 8.00 am and 3.59 pm); and
2. to determine whether there was a change in the rate and characteristics of assault incidents on school premises over the five-year period from 2005 to 2009.

The specific research questions investigated in this study were:

1. What proportion of young assault victims are assaulted on school premises?
2. What are the characteristics of a typical assault incident involving school-aged children on school premises during school hours?
3. Has there been a change over time in the rate and location of school assaults?
4. Has the severity of assaults between school-aged children on school premises increased over time?
5. Has there been a change over time in the proportion of incidents involving girls as offenders?

## METHOD

The study sample consisted of incidents of alleged assault recorded as having occurred on the premises of both government and non-government schools in NSW from 2005 to 2009 (both inclusive). These incidents were drawn from the NSW Police Force's Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS), the administrative database onto which NSW police officers record criminal incidents which are reported to, or detected by, them. For each criminal incident, the COPS database allows officers to record both coded information in standardised data fields and a free-text description ('narrative') of the incident. The current study utilised information from the standardised data fields for all assault incidents recorded on school premises over the five-year period from 2005 to 2009. Incidents of assault which were recorded for 2009 were examined in more detail as these are the most recent data available. In addition, the narratives of a random sample of 300 incidents which occurred in 2009 were examined to extract information regarding the type of victim and offender, and the location of the incident on school premises. While this information is not recorded in the standardised data fields, it is often, but not always, included in the free-text description of the incident.

## RESULTS

### What proportion of young assault victims are assaulted on school premises?

Table 1 shows the number and proportion of school-aged assault victims (i.e. aged five years or more and less than 18 years) by the type of premises where the alleged assault occurred.

Table 1 shows that, between January and December 2009, police recorded 12,150 school-aged victims of alleged assault. The vast majority (87.9%) of these young victims were assaulted on premises other than schools, with a total of 73.4 per cent occurring in either residential premises (37.4%) or outdoors/public places/car parks (36.0%). By contrast, school premises

**Table 1. School-aged assault victims by type of premises, NSW, 2009**

Type of Premises	Assault victims aged ≥ 5 years and < 18 years	
	N	%
<b>School premises</b>		
(a) During school hours		
· Non-government schools	119	1.0
· Government primary schools	264	2.2
· Government secondary schools	1,049	8.6
Total during school hours	1,432	11.8
(b) Total outside school hours	38	0.3
<b>Total on school premises</b>	<b>1,470</b>	<b>12.1</b>
<b>Premises other than school</b>		
Residential	4,545	37.4
Outdoor/public place/car park	4,369	36
Business/commercial	820	6.7
Public transport	474	3.9
Recreation	247	2.0
Licensed premises	101	0.8
Other premises <sup>a</sup>	124	1.0
<b>Total on premises other than schools</b>	<b>10,680</b>	<b>87.9</b>
<b>Total on all premises</b>	<b>12,150</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Notes.

To ensure that only school-aged victims were included in Table 1, victims were excluded if their age was not recorded by police officers in the COPS database.

Table 1 includes school-aged victims regardless of whether the offender(s) in the incident were identified and regardless of the offender(s)' age(s), hence the different totals between Table 1 and subsequent Tables.

All percentages are percentages of the total number of school-aged assault victims on all premises (n = 12,150).

<sup>a</sup> other premises = utilities, industrial, other education [college of advanced education, Conservatorium of Music, library, pre-school], health, law enforcement, religious, rural industry, marine transport, vehicle, unknown premises

accounted for 1,470 (12.1%) of all assault victims aged five years or more and less than 18 years. Almost all (n = 1,432, 97.4%) of these victims were assaulted during school hours (i.e. between 8.00 am and 3.59 pm).

### What are the characteristics of a typical assault incident involving school-aged children on school premises during school hours?

#### Number of victims and offenders in assault incidents

In 2009, a total of 846 incidents of alleged assault occurred on school premises involving victims and offenders of school age. Of these, 809 (or 95.6%) incidents occurred during school hours and the remaining 37 incidents occurred outside these hours.

Table 2 shows that, in 2009, one victim and one offender of school age were involved in 82.1 per cent (or 664) of police-recorded assault incidents on school premises during school hours. A further 11.6 per cent of incidents involved two or more offenders assaulting one victim. Therefore, 93.7 per cent of incidents involved only one victim.

**Table 2. Number of school-aged victims and offenders involved in assault incidents on school premises during school hours, NSW, 2009**

Number of offenders	Number of victims					
	One		Two or more		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
One	664	82.1	25	3.1	689	85.2
Two or more	94	11.6	26	3.2	120	14.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>93.7</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>809</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes.

Incidents were counted only if the age of each victim and each offender in the incident was recorded and was  $\geq 5$  years and  $< 18$  years (i.e. of school age). However, they may not be school students as this information is not recorded in the standardised data fields of the COPS database.

All percentages are percentages of the total number of incidents for which the relevant information was recorded in the COPS database (n = 809).

**Table 3. Recorded incidents of assault between school-aged children on school premises during school hours, NSW, 2009: Gender of victim by gender of offender**

Gender of offender	Gender of victim					
	Female		Male		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	201	30.3	19	2.9	220	33.2
Male	53	8	390	58.8	443	66.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>38.3</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>61.7</b>	<b>663</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes.

Incidents were counted only if the age of both the victim and the offender in the incident was recorded and was  $\geq 5$  years  $< 18$  years; and the gender of both the victim and the offender was recorded.

All percentages are percentages of the total number of incidents for which the relevant information was recorded in the COPS database (n = 663).

**Table 4. Assault incidents on school premises during school hours, NSW, 2009: Age of victim by age of offender**

Age of offender	Age of victim (years)															
	$\geq 5 < 12$		12		13		14		15		16		17		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
$\geq 5 < 12$	61	9.3	7	1.1	3	0.5	3	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	74	11.3
12	11	1.7	26	4.0	14	2.1	3	0.5	0	0.0	2	0.3	1	0.1	57	8.7
13	6	0.9	27	4.1	57	8.7	28	4.3	7	1.1	2	0.3	0	0.0	127	19.3
14	2	0.3	10	1.5	26	4.0	69	10.5	31	4.7	11	1.7	1	0.1	150	22.8
15	4	0.6	6	0.9	21	3.2	35	5.3	57	8.7	19	2.9	3	0.5	145	22.1
16	1	0.1	3	0.5	4	0.6	15	2.3	19	2.9	19	2.9	7	1.1	68	10.3
17	1	0.1	3	0.5	3	0.5	8	1.2	6	0.9	7	1.1	8	1.2	36	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>657</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes.

Incidents were counted only if the age of both the victim and the offender in the incident was recorded and was  $\geq 5$  years and  $< 18$  years (i.e. of school age).

All percentages are percentages of the total number of incidents for which the relevant information was recorded in the COPS database (n = 657).

### Gender of victim by gender of offender

Table 3 shows the gender of the victim in relation to the gender of the offender in recorded assault incidents which occurred in 2009 on school premises during school hours and involved one victim and one offender, both of school age. Table 3 shows that males comprised the majority of both victims (61.7%) and offenders (66.8%) in these incidents. The vast majority (89.1%) of assaults involved victims and offenders of the same gender – 30.3 per cent involved a female victim and offender, and 58.8 per cent involved a male victim and offender.

### Age of victim by age of offender

Table 4 shows the age of the victim in relation to the age of the offender in recorded incidents of assault which occurred in 2009 on school premises during school hours and involved one victim and one offender, both of school age. As Table 4 shows, the majority of offenders (64.2%) were aged either 13

(19.3%), 14 (22.8%) or 15 (22.1%) years. The average age of these offenders was 13.9 years (SD = 1.6). Similarly, the majority of victims (62.2%) were aged either 13 (19.5%), 14 (24.5%) or 15 (18.3%) years; their average age was 13.6 years (SD = 1.6). Assaults between school-aged children generally involved children of similar ages.

### Type of victim by type of offender

Table 5 shows the type of victim by the type of offender involved in 262 assault incidents which occurred on school premises in 2009 and involved one victim and one offender. As Table 5 shows, in these incidents, students comprised the majority of offenders (90.8%) and victims (85.1%). Also the majority (78.6%) of incidents were between school students. In 31 (11.8%) incidents, a student allegedly assaulted a school employee, either a school principal, assistant principal, teacher or a school official. However, in 8 (3.0%) incidents, a school student was allegedly the victim of a teacher.

**Table 5. Assault incidents on school premises during school hours, NSW, 2009: Type of victim by type of offender**

Type of victim	Type of offender								Total	
	Student		Adult <sup>b</sup>		Teacher		Other			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Student	206	78.6	7	2.7	8	3.0	2	0.8	223	85.1
School employee <sup>a</sup>	31	11.8	4	1.5	1	0.4	-	-	36	13.7
Adult	1	0.4	2	0.8	-	-	-	-	3	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>90.8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes.

All percentages are percentages of the total number of assault incidents for which police officers documented information in the COPS narratives database regarding the occupation of both the victim and the offender (n = 262). For 38 (12.7%) of the randomly selected sample of 300 narratives of assaults, police officers did not record information regarding the type of victim or the type of offender. These incidents of assault were therefore excluded from the analysis.

<sup>a</sup> school employee = school principal, assistant school principal, teacher, school official, caretaker

<sup>b</sup> adult = parent, grandparent, relative of student

**Table 6. Assault incidents on school premises during school hours, NSW, 2009: Time of incident by location of incident**

Location of incident	Time of incident				Total	
	8.00 am - 11.59 am		12 noon - 3.59 pm			
	N	%	N	%	N	%
School playground, oval	20	9.3	30	13.9	50	23.3
School corridor, staircase, toilet block, gymnasium, other school building	30	13.9	19	8.8	49	22.8
School grounds (not further specified)	23	10.7	25	11.6	48	22.3
Perimeter of school grounds, bus stop, school car park, school fence/gates	10	4.6	27	12.6	37	17.2
Classroom, principal's office, front office	15	7.0	16	7.4	31	14.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>54.4</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes.

Incidents are included only if both the time and the location of the assault were recorded in the COPS database.

All percentages are percentages of the total number of incidents for which the relevant information was recorded in the COPS database (n = 215).

### Location of incident by time of incident

Table 6 shows the relationship between the location of the incident on the school grounds and whether the incident occurred during the morning or afternoon of the school day.

As Table 6 shows, 54.4 per cent of the assault incidents recorded during school hours occurred during the afternoon. The most common locations of incidents were the school playground or oval (23.3%) and the school corridors/staircases/toilet blocks/gymnasium (22.8%).

### Severity of injury to victim by type of police action against offender

Table 7 shows the type of action taken by police officers against the offender by the severity of injury to the victim in the assault incidents which occurred in 2009 between school-aged children on school premises during school hours. As Table 7 shows, the offender was not charged in 64.2 per cent of these incidents. In fact, no charge was the most common police action against the offender for each level of injury severity. For slightly more than a quarter of the assaults in which the victim sustained some form of injury, police officers issued offenders with a caution or a warning (Young Offenders Act, YOA); this was the case for 28.6 per cent of incidents in which the victim sustained minor physical injuries and 26.2 per cent of incidents in which the victim sustained either mid-level physical injuries, major physical injuries or multiple injuries.

### Has there been a change over time in the rate and location of school assaults?

#### Trend in rates of assaults between school-aged children

Table 8 shows the trend, over the five-year period, in both the number and the rate of police-recorded incidents of assault between school-aged children. It compares the number of incidents on government school premises during school hours per 100,000 enrolled students to the number of incidents on all other premises per 100,000 head of school-aged children in the community.

Table 8 shows that, for each of the five years between 2005 and 2009, the majority of assault incidents between school-aged children on school premises occurred during school hours (i.e. between 8.00 am and 3.59 pm). In government schools (both primary and secondary schools combined), the recorded rate of assaults per 100,000 student enrolments increased from 85.0 in 2005 to 106.2 in 2009; an average annual percentage change in rate of 5.72 per cent. This change is statistically significant.

Compared with government primary schools, government secondary schools had a much higher number and rate of assaults involving school-aged children. The rate per 100,000 enrolments in government secondary schools was between six (2005) and nine (2009) times higher than in government

**Table 7. Assault incidents between school-aged children on school premises during school hours, NSW, 2009: Severity of victim's injury by the type of police action against the offender**

Police action against offender	Severity of victim's injury						Total	
	No visible injuries		Minor physical injuries		Mid-level or major physical injuries, multiple injuries			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No charge	56	77.8	47	67.1	69	54.8	172	64.2
Caution or warning, YOA	10	13.9	20	28.6	33	26.2	63	23.5
Conference, YOA	1	1.4	1	1.4	11	8.7	13	4.8
Court Attendance Notice	5	8.3	2	2.9	13	10.3	20	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes.

For 396 incidents, no information was recorded in the standardised data fields in the COPS database regarding injuries to the victim and/or police action against the offender.

Based on both the classification used by Hilliar (2008) and the information recorded by police officers in the COPS database, injuries were ranked in the following way:

- minor physical injuries = swelling, bruising, minor lacerations, red marks, shock, other
- mid-level physical injuries = burns, bleeding, muscle torn/strained, sprain, torn ligament, whiplash
- major physical injuries = severe lacerations, unconscious, fracture
- multiple injuries are not specified further

**Table 8. Trend in number and rates (per 100,000 population) of recorded assault incidents between school-aged children on government school premises and other premises, NSW, 2005 – 2009**

Location of incident	Year of incident										Average annual percentage change in rate over 2005 – 2009 <sup>c</sup>
	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		
	N	Rate <sup>b</sup>	N	Rate	N	Rate	N	Rate	N	Rate	
<b>Government school premises</b>											
(a) During school hours											
• Primary schools	123	28.8	124	29.2	122	28.9	99	23.5	105	24.9	stable
• Secondary schools	489	166.6	550	186.8	590	199.8	603	205	655	222.7	7.53 (p = 0.01)
Total in government schools	612	85.0	674	93.7	712	99.2	702	98.2	760	106.2	5.72 (p = 0.05)
(b) Outside school hours	38	-	50	-	37	-	44	-	37	-	-
<b>Other premises<sup>a</sup></b>	4,886	416.5	5,014	427.1	5,071	431.3	5,083	432.9	5,077	432.5	0.95 (p = 0.05)

<sup>a</sup> All premises other than school premises.

<sup>b</sup> For school premises, the rate of assault is per 100,000 students enrolled in government schools. NSW Department of Education (DET) provided information regarding the number of enrolments in government schools during each of the five years of the study period. Information regarding the number of enrolments in non-government schools was not available from DET; hence the focus on rates of assault incidents in government schools.

For other premises, the rate is per 100,000 children aged ≥ 5 years and <18 years living in NSW (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 2009, Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, Catalogue No.: 3201.0).

<sup>c</sup> Kendall's rank-order correlation test was used to test for significant upward or downward trends over the five-year period (2005 – 2009).

primary schools, and this rate increased from 166.6 in 2005 to 222.7 in 2009. The average annual percentage change (7.53%) over the five years is statistically significant. For government primary schools, the recorded rate of assaults per 100,000 enrolments decreased from about 29 in each of the three years from 2005 to 2007 to 23.5 in 2008 and 24.9 in 2009. This change is not statistically significant.

Table 8 shows that there has also been an increase over the five-year period in the rate of assaults between school-aged children on all premises other than school premises. Each year, this rate is between four and five times higher than the rate of assaults between school-aged children on government school premises.

### Geographical location of assault incidents

Table 9 shows the trend in both the number and the rate of recorded assault incidents between school-aged children during school hours on school premises by each of the Statistical Sub-

Divisions in Sydney and each of the regional Statistical Divisions. It indicates the number of assaults per 100,000 school-aged children living in that Statistical Division; the Statistical Divisions are ranked from highest to the lowest, based on the figures for 2009. As Table 9 shows, in some regional Statistical Divisions and some metropolitan Sub-Divisions, the rate of assaults involving school-aged children on school premises has been consistently higher than the State rate, for example, Northern, North Western, Central West, the Murrumbidgee, Outer South Western Sydney, Outer Western Sydney and Blacktown. While the rates of assaults fluctuated from year to year in the various Statistical Divisions and Sub-Divisions, the trend over the five-year period has remained stable.

Table 8 showed a statistically significant upward trend across the five years in the rate of recorded assault incidents between school-aged children on government school premises during school hours, but Table 9 shows that the trend was stable in

**Table 9. Trend in number and rates (per 100,000 population) of recorded incidents of assaults between school-aged children on school premises during school hours by Statistical Division, NSW, 2005 - 2009**

Statistical Division	Year of incident										Trend <sup>a</sup>
	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		
	N	Rate	N	Rate	N	Rate	N	Rate	N	Rate	
Far West	5	259	4	209	2	52	6	211	5	342	n.c.
North Western	41	385	30	291	44	314	38	294	45	330	stable
Central West	31	151	29	138	35	155	52	208	34	268	stable
Northern	43	213	50	230	51	223	58	269	53	246	stable
Outer South Western Sydney	43	206	53	221	56	215	47	186	66	236	stable
Outer Western Sydney	47	152	51	152	58	175	50	154	70	212	stable
Blacktown	40	207	59	218	59	223	42	164	35	185	stable
Illawarra	43	108	65	163	62	134	60	131	66	177	stable
Murrumbidgee	27	172	31	168	30	194	40	199	35	176	stable
Richmond-Tweed	14	81	20	102	30	135	32	135	27	138	n.c.
Mid-North Coast	40	141	39	119	52	314	43	140	50	135	stable
Hunter	73	117	74	115	59	103	60	109	73	118	stable
South Eastern	32	160	25	120	26	110	22	106	20	117	stable
Fairfield-Liverpool	35	122	37	103	29	102	35	99	41	114	stable
Central Western Sydney	28	109	24	117	22	122	38	121	23	100	stable
Canterbury-Bankstown	14	56	22	84	27	112	20	79	27	96	n.c.
Gosford-Wyong	36	137	36	116	41	137	24	80	32	92	stable
Inner Sydney	9	107	8	89	11	99	12	101	7	67	n.c.
Lower Northern Sydney	5	32	7	32	8	39	7	34	12	59	n.c.
St George-Sutherland	12	48	21	61	20	48	25	75	19	58	n.c.
Eastern Suburbs	9	52	12	95	6	51	13	90	7	54	n.c.
Murray	14	98	7	73	14	129	18	129	7	48	n.c.
Inner Western Sydney	5	64	3	42	6	37	5	77	6	44	n.c.
Northern Beaches	5	20	6	28	5	22	2	19	7	44	n.c.
Central Northern Sydney	21	54	15	33	12	31	9	35	13	39	n.c.
<b>NSW</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>728</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>765</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>stable</b>

**Notes.**

The rates for some Statistical Divisions must be treated with caution as they have relatively small populations of school-aged children, and/or low numbers of assaults, resulting in wide variations.

The estimates are based on the 2006 ABS census for children aged ≥ 5 years and < 18 years. These are then used to estimate the school-aged population for the other years using the ABS regional population for those other years.

<sup>a</sup> Kendall's rank-order correlation test was used to test for significant upward or downward trends over the five-year period (2005 – 2009).

n.c. the number of incidents recorded was too small for a reliable trend test to be performed.

individual Statistical Divisions and Sub-Divisions. The likely explanation for the apparent contradiction between Tables 8 and 9 is that the rate of assault in Table 8 is per 100,000 students enrolled in government schools only, whereas the rate in Table 9 is per 100,000 children of school age (i.e. ≥ 5 years and <18 years) living in that Statistical Division/Sub-Division; the latter would therefore include children who have left school as well as children enrolled in non-government schools.

### Has the severity of assaults between school-aged children on school premises increased over time?

Indications of the severity of assaults are provided by characteristics such as the type of assault, the type of weapon involved and the severity of the injury sustained by the victims.

### Type of assault

Table 10 shows the trend in the type of assault recorded by police for assault incidents which occurred on school premises during school hours and involved school-aged children.

There is no statistically significant difference across the five years in the relative frequency of the different types of assault ( $\chi^2(8) = 5.11, p = 0.75$ ).

Table 10 shows that, each year, at least three in four of the police-recorded assault incidents which involved school-aged children on school premises during school hours were classified as common assault (the less serious type of assault). Each year, about 20 per cent were classified as actual bodily harm and less than two per cent were classified as grievous bodily harm; these are the more serious forms of assault.

**Table 10. Trend in type of assault for assault incidents on school premises during school hours involving school-aged children, NSW, 2005 - 2009**

Type of assault	Year of incident									
	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Common assault <sup>a</sup>	524	78.0	575	79.0	592	77.4	571	75.3	614	75.8
Actual bodily harm <sup>b</sup>	141	21.0	141	19.4	161	21.0	174	23	183	22.6
Grievous bodily harm, including malicious wounding <sup>b</sup>	7	1.0	12	1.6	12	1.6	13	1.7	13	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>728</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>765</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> this is a less serious type of assault

<sup>b</sup> these are more serious types of assault

**Table 11. Trend in assault incidents on school premises during school hours involving school-aged children, NSW, 2005 - 2009: Type of weapon involved**

Type of weapon	Year of incident									
	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No weapon/fists, feet, body	608	90.5	664	91.2	707	92.4	707	93.3	746	92.1
Knife, sword, scissors, screwdriver	44	6.5	43	5.9	35	4.6	31	4.1	48	5.9
Other weapon <sup>a</sup>	20	3.0	21	2.9	23	3.0	20	2.6	16	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>728</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>765</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> other weapon = blow gun, firearm/weapon not further seen or described, other firearms, brick, rock, stone, missile, club, iron bar, pipe, glass, bottle, wire, belt, cord, diabetic test needle, other prohibited weapon and multiple weapons

**Table 12. Trend in assault incidents on school premises during school hours involving school-aged children, NSW, 2005 - 2009: Severity of injury to victim**

Severity of injury to victim	Year of incident									
	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No visible injuries	55	26.1	89	37.1	81	30.1	83	30.2	96	29.7
Minor physical injuries <sup>a</sup>	47	22.3	46	19.2	71	26.4	66	24.0	79	24.5
Mid-level physical injuries, major physical injuries, fatal or life-threatening injuries <sup>b</sup>	18	8.5	11	4.6	8	3.0	12	4.4	14	4.3
Multiple injuries <sup>c</sup>	91	43.1	94	39.2	109	40.5	114	41.4	134	41.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> minor physical injuries = swelling, bruising, minor lacerations, red marks, shock, other

<sup>b</sup> mid-level physical injuries = burns, bleeding, muscle torn/strained, sprain, torn ligament, whiplash

major physical injuries = severe lacerations, unconscious, fracture

fatal or life-threatening injuries = internal injury, coma, severed body part, spinal injury

<sup>c</sup> multiple injuries are not specified further

**Table 13. Trend in gender of offender in assault incidents on school premises during school hours involving school-aged children, NSW, 2005 - 2009**

Gender of offender	Year of incident									
	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	213	31.7	237	32.6	227	30.7	242	32.0	271	33.5
Male	459	68.3	491	67.4	538	70.3	515	68.0	538	66.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>728</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>765</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>809</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note. Information regarding gender was not recorded for one offender in each of 2008 and 2009.

## Weapon use

Table 11 shows, for each of the five years in the study, the type of weapon which is reported to have been used in recorded incidents of assault which occurred on school premises during school hours and involved victim(s) and offender(s) of school age.

Over the five years, there was no change in the pattern of weapon type involved in these assault incidents ( $\chi^2(8) = 8.28, p > 0.05$ ). Table 11 shows that at least 90 per cent of each year's assaults involved no weapon or the offender's fists, feet or body; and between 4.1 per cent (2008) and 6.5 per cent (2005) of incidents reportedly involved either a knife, sword, scissors or screwdriver.

Over the five-year period, police officers recorded that some type of 'firearm or weapon not further seen or described' was involved in three assault incidents on school premises. However, inspection of the free-text narratives associated with these incidents showed that, in fact, the following items were involved: a deodorant spray can (1 incident) and two cigarette lighters in the shape of small handguns (1 incident). In the third incident, police officers recorded that the victim stated that a weapon shaped like a knife was involved.

## Severity of injury to victim

Table 12 shows the trend in the severity of injury suffered by school-aged victims in recorded assault incidents which occurred during school hours and involved children of school age.

There is no statistically significant difference across the five years in the severity of injury sustained by victims as a result of being assaulted by school-aged offenders on school premises during school hours ( $\chi^2(12) = 16.76, p > 0.05$ ). Table 12 shows that, each year, at least one-quarter of school-aged assault victims received no visible injuries, and about one-quarter sustained minor injuries. While approximately two in five victims sustained multiple injuries, the severity of these injuries is not known because police officers did not specify the types of injuries involved.

## Has there been a change over time in the proportion of assaults involving girls as offenders?

Table 13 shows the trend over the five years in the gender of the school-aged offender in assault incidents which occurred on school premises during school hours.

There is no statistically significant difference over the five years in the relative frequency of boys and girls in these incidents of assault ( $\chi^2(4) = 2.86, p = 0.582$ ). As Table 13 shows, each year, about two in three offenders were boys.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From 2005 to 2009, there was a statistically significant upward trend in the rate of police-recorded incidents of assault between school-aged children on school premises during school hours. However, this rate is between four and five times lower than the rate of assault between school-aged children on other premises.

In 2009, school premises accounted for 12.1 per cent of all school-aged assault victims in NSW. Given that school-aged children spend approximately eight hours of each week day at school, this suggests that school premises in NSW are relatively safe environments. Of the assaults which occurred on school premises, the typical assault happened in the afternoon in a government secondary school, involved two students of the same gender (generally boys), aged between 13 and 15 years, involved no weapon, was classified as common assault (the less serious type of assault), resulted in either no visible injuries or minor injuries to the victim and resulted in the offender not being charged by the police.

While the profile of these assaults is broadly similar to that of the early 1990s, there were two differences between the two time periods. The first difference relates to the site of the incidents on the school grounds. In the early 1990s, the school playground was the site of 63.1 per cent of the assault incidents (Trimboli & Bonney, 1994). By contrast, in 2009, the school playground or oval accounted for 23.3 per cent of incidents, with the school corridors/staircases/toilet blocks/gymnasium accounting for another 22.8 per cent of incidents. The second difference between the two time periods deals with the recorded rates of assault per 100,000 student enrolments. For the years 1990 to 1992, these rates were substantially lower than the rates for the last five years. For example, in 1992, the recorded rate of assaults per 100,000 secondary school students was 41.8, whereas in 2009, the rate was 222.7 or 5.3 times higher.

It is not possible to determine whether these increases reflect an actual increase in assault over time, a greater willingness to report assaults, a lower tolerance of less serious assaults, or a combination of these, and perhaps other, factors. However, increases in rates of police-recorded assault incidents on school premises reflect a broader trend in NSW. Across all types of premises, the rate of police-recorded incidents of assault more than doubled between 1990 and 2007 (Moffatt & Goh, 2008), although most of the increase occurred by 2001, with the rate then becoming stable. From the mid-1990s, increases in rates of assault have been observed for different types of premises in NSW. For example, assault rates on hospital premises increased from 3.5 per 100,000 people in NSW in 1996 to 4.7 in 2006;

again, most of this increase occurred by 2001 (Hilliar, 2008). Substantial increases in rates of assault also occurred between 1995 and 2007 for residential premises (up 103%), business/commercial premises (up 87%), licensed premises (up 59%), and outdoor/public places (up 33%) (Ringland & Baker, 2009).

Reporting may be responsible for at least part of the increase in recorded incidents on government school premises in recent years. Since 2003, there have been a number of policy, procedural and organisational changes which have become progressively more refined and specific. In May 2002, the Safety and Security Directorate was established within the NSW Department of Education and Training. In late 2003, this was followed by the establishment of a hotline for school principals to obtain support in effectively managing crime-related incidents, including advice about when police should be notified. This hotline is staffed by experienced police officers and teachers and operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including holidays. From 2005, it became mandatory for school principals to report to the School Safety and Response Hotline all incidents involving violence (including threats and intimidation), or weapons (including replicas and ammunition), or other criminal activity. More recently, in September 2007, the Department issued a new Incident Reporting Policy and supporting procedures. These made it mandatory for government school principals to immediately report to the Department all incidents involving injury to employees, students or visitors, and incidents involving violence, weapons or major criminal activity. School principals were also informed that they should report all crime-related incidents to the police 'to enable them to respond, record information and suggest crime prevention strategies' (Department of Education and Training, Links Bulletin No. 6, 2005). Closer working relationships have been encouraged between the police and both government and non-government schools by the development of agreements (such as *Memorandum of Understanding for Information Exchange between Schools and NSW Police*) and local procedures such as meetings between school principals and Local Area Commanders.

These various activities may have contributed to increases in recent years in reported assault incidents on school premises in NSW.

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