



Recent trends in property and drug-related crime in Kings Cross

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Trends in property and drug-related crime in Kings Cross were examined over the period from mid-2002 (when the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) operations were extended) through to mid-2006. Consistent with the findings of the original evaluation of the impact of the MSIC on crime, it was found that theft and robbery offences showed a similar, predominantly decreasing pattern in Kings Cross as was the case throughout the rest of Sydney. Recorded cases of dealing/trafficking in narcotics declined in both Kings Cross and the rest of Sydney. Recorded cases of possession/use of narcotics have remained stable in Kings Cross, but have declined throughout the rest of Sydney. Recorded cases of using and trafficking in amphetamines have shown no significant increase in Kings Cross but have significantly increased throughout the rest of Sydney. Recorded cases of possession/use of cocaine have increased in both Kings Cross and the rest of Sydney. Recorded cases of dealing and trafficking in cocaine briefly increased in Kings Cross (but not the rest of Sydney) but have since declined. The number of cocaine trafficking offences remains lower in Kings Cross than it was prior to the opening of the MSIC. There was a sharp increase in police 'move ons' in Kings Cross around the time the MSIC commenced operations in mid-2001. This change, however, probably reflects police efforts to prevent drug-related loitering rather than a real increase in drug-related loitering. It is concluded that the continued operation of the MSIC has not at this stage had an adverse impact on crime in Kings Cross.

INTRODUCTION

As part of the original evaluation of the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC), the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) conducted intervention analyses to assess the impact of the MSIC on various indicators of drug-related crime. This evaluation comprised an interrupted time series design covering the period January 1999 through September 2002 and involved comparing changes in the frequency of recorded incidents of theft and robbery after the opening of the MSIC in May 2001 with what was occurring with these crimes throughout the rest of Sydney (Freeman et al. 2005). These analyses found that the Australia-wide heroin shortage, which had become

apparent just after Christmas 2000 (Rouen et al. 2001), was the major reason for changes in the frequency of these crimes in Kings Cross, rather than the MSIC itself. Specifically, there was an initial increase in the level of these crimes around the time of the heroin shortage, followed by a consistent declining trend thereafter. There was no significant change in the level of either theft or robbery incidents in Kings Cross after the MSIC commenced operations (Freeman et al. 2005).

The initial evaluation also examined the impact of the MSIC on drug-related loitering in Kings Cross, in order to determine whether or not the MSIC had resulted in a so-called 'honey-pot effect' whereby extra injecting drug users may have been attracted to the Kings Cross area because of the MSIC. This

was achieved by conducting counts of loiterers in the Kings Cross area over the period October 2000 through October 2002. No significant change in the number of drug-related loiterers outside the front of the MSIC was apparent, though there was a brief increase in the total number of loiterers, which was then followed by a consistent declining trend in the number of loiterers thereafter. On the basis of these intervention analyses and key informant interviews with Kings Cross community members and police, it was concluded that the MSIC had not resulted in a 'honey-pot effect' (Freeman et al. 2005).

The aim of this monitoring report is to present information on trends in recorded theft, robbery and drug offences as well as move-on incidents in the Kings Cross

area from the extension of the MSIC pilot in late 2002 until June 2006. As per the original MSIC evaluation, the rest of Sydney serves as a comparison site for observed trends in these crimes in Kings Cross over this period.

In order to measure drug-related and violent crime we examined trends in the total number of recorded robbery and theft incidents and also the number of possession/use and trafficking offences for heroin (narcotics), amphetamines and cocaine. It should be noted from the outset that changes in the number of these drug use and trafficking offences can sometimes reflect changes in enforcement activity rather than the actual level of drug-related crime itself. In terms of this continued monitoring of crime trends, it was not considered feasible to recommence counts of loiterers, partly because of the substantial costs involved in conducting such counts, but more importantly because the information provided would be of limited value given that this time series information had not been collected since late 2002. Given this, we examined the number of instances of police 'move ons' of someone suspected of loitering for the purposes of committing a drug offence. It should be noted, however, that due to the discretionary nature of police 'move on' powers, trends in these incident numbers may reflect changes in enforcement practice rather than changes in the actual level of drug-related loitering in local areas.

METHOD

The monthly numbers of recorded robbery, theft and drug incidents for the period January 1999 to June 2006 were obtained from the Computerised Operating Policing System (COPS). These aggregates were obtained for the Kings Cross Local Area Command (LAC), as well as for the rest of Sydney (Inner Metropolitan and Outer Metropolitan Police regions). Component categories of robbery included: robbery without a weapon; robbery with a firearm and robbery with a weapon other than a firearm. In terms of theft, component

offences included break and enter (dwelling and non-dwelling respectively); stealing (from motor vehicle; retail store; dwelling and person respectively); fraud and 'other theft' incidents. Robbery incidents differ from theft incidents in that the former involves the offender either using or threatening to use force against the victim. As stated above, we limited drug offences to those involving trafficking/dealing or using/possessing cocaine, narcotics and amphetamines. These drugs can all be injected, which makes them the most relevant for consideration in this study, rather than a drug such as cannabis.

The total numbers of recorded robbery, theft and drug incidents were graphed over the period January 1999 through June 2006, for the Kings Cross LAC and also for the rest of Sydney. Changes in the total numbers of recorded theft, robbery and drug offences were provided for the four financial years between July 2002 and June 2006 in order to provide a summary of changes in the volume of these incidents since the extension of the MSIC trial in late 2002. The Kendall's non-parametric test for trend was applied to each specific robbery, theft and drug offence over the 48-month period for Kings Cross LAC and the rest of Sydney respectively.

The number of recorded 'move on' incidents was graphed over the period July 1998 to June 2006 for Kings Cross and surrounding LACs (The Rocks, Surry Hills and Central Sydney). Surrounding LACs were chosen for comparison rather than the rest of Sydney because Kings Cross and surrounding LACs both have large transient visitor populations.

RESULTS

ROBBERY OFFENCES

Figure 1 shows changes in the total number of recorded robbery incidents per month over the period January 1999 through June 2006, for the Kings Cross LAC and the rest of Sydney. Differently scaled (though proportional) vertical axes were used in order to more readily compare the trend over time in the smaller Kings Cross area with that throughout the rest of Sydney.

There was an initial transient increase in robbery incidents in both Kings Cross and the rest of Sydney shortly after the onset of the heroin shortage in January 2001. This increase has been identified previously throughout the whole of NSW and linked to a transient increase in the availability of cocaine in NSW

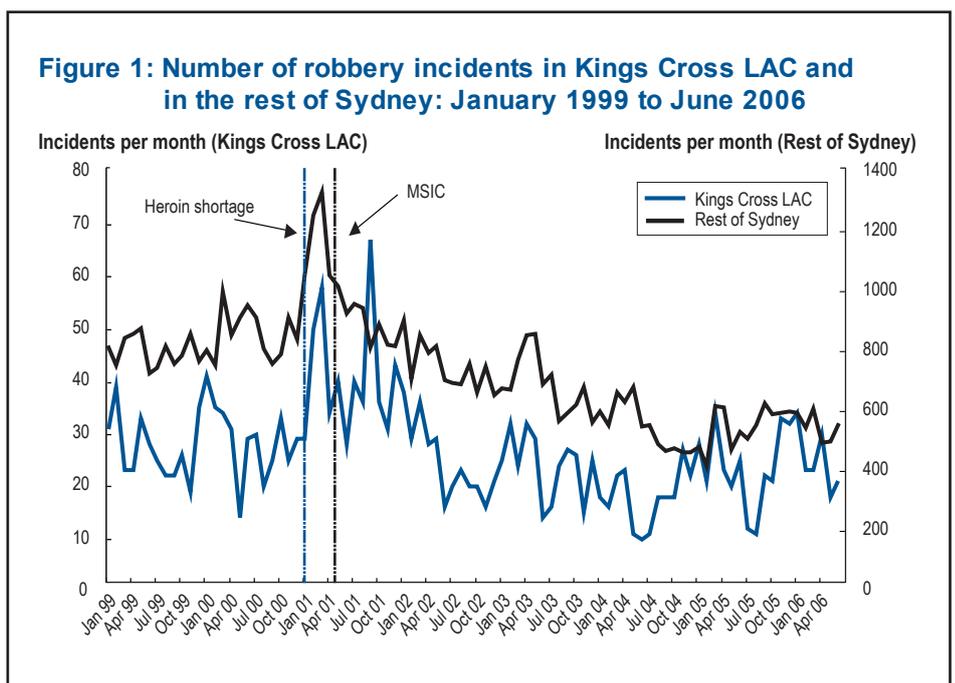


Table 1: Changes in the number of robbery incidents in the Kings Cross LAC and the Rest of Sydney: July 2002 – June 2006

	Rest of Sydney				Kings Cross LAC			
	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06
Robbery without a weapon	5,244	4,482	3,647	4,104*	193	163	185	210
Robbery with a firearm	712	762	387	509*	8	8	5	13
Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	2,787	2,195	2,022	2,164*	75	62	75	57
Total	8,743	7,439	6,056	6,777*	276	233	265	280

* $p < 0.05$, Kendall's non-parametric test for linear trend

(Degenhardt et al. 2005; Donnelly, Weatherburn & Chilvers 2004). This transient increase occurred before the opening of the MSIC in May 2001. There was a second transient increase in robbery incidents in Kings Cross in September 2001, which has also been attributed to the increase in the availability in cocaine.

From mid to late 2001, robberies decreased throughout the rest of Sydney until approximately the middle of 2005. The recorded number of incidents then levelled off. In the Kings Cross LAC, robberies decreased until approximately the beginning of 2003 and then levelled off. Note that the higher volatility in the Kings Cross LAC group is due to the smaller number of incidents compared to the rest of Sydney category.

Table 1 shows changes in the annual number of robbery incidents from July 2002 to June 2006 for both the Kings Cross LAC and the rest of Sydney.

In Kings Cross LAC, the total number of robbery incidents decreased by 15 per cent between 2002-03 and 2003-04, then increased slightly over the two subsequent financial years. This resulted in a non-significant overall trend over the four-year period. None of the sub-categories of robbery showed a significant trend in either direction over the whole period in Kings Cross LAC.

By comparison, the net total number of robbery incidents in the rest of Sydney decreased by 22 per cent ($p < 0.001$). All robbery sub-categories showed significant reductions in incident numbers over the four-year period. There was,

however, a near significant increase in total robberies throughout the rest of Sydney during 2005/06 compared with the previous 12-month period ($p=0.06$). This increase was around 12 per cent in magnitude, which is around twice that observed in Kings Cross LAC over the same period.

THEFT OFFENCES

Figure 2 shows changes in the total number of recorded theft-related incidents per month between January 1999 and June 2006 for the Kings Cross LAC and for the rest of Sydney. This graph clearly shows that from mid-2001 to the end of 2004, the number of theft incidents in the Kings Cross LAC and in the rest of Sydney steadily decreased.

beginning of 2005 to June 2006 there was no noticeable overall change in the number of incidents in either area.

Focusing on the period since the extension of the MSIC trial, Table 2 shows changes in the number of recorded theft incidents over the four years from July 2002 to June 2006. The total number of recorded theft incidents in the Kings Cross LAC declined by 34 per cent, from 5,952 incidents to 3,909 incidents ($p < 0.001$). Considering the specific sub-categories of theft, most showed the same overall pattern. However, there were differences in trend direction and magnitude across some categories. Kendall's test for trend suggested significant decreases for all categories with the exception of "steal from a retail

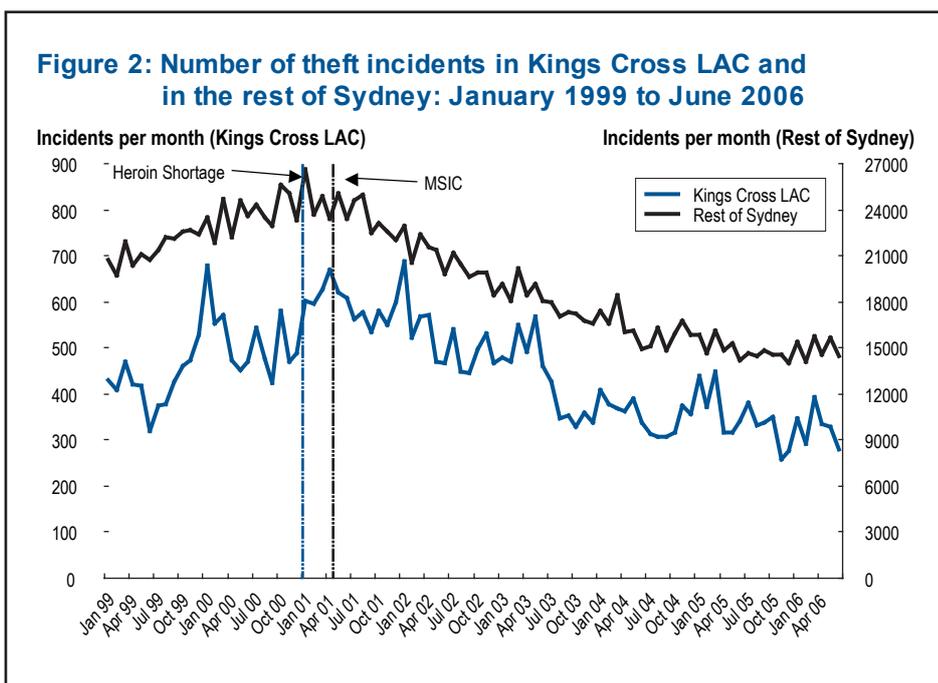


Table 2: Changes in the number of theft incidents in the Kings Cross LAC and the rest of Sydney: July 2002 – June 2006

	Rest of Sydney				Kings Cross LAC			
	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06
Break and enter dwelling	38,672	34,722	29,195	27,901*	441	287	285	182*
Break and enter non-dwelling	19,459	15,352	13,530	12,878*	289	208	216	131*
Receiving or handling stolen goods	5,912	4,872	4,333	3,676*	477	260	198	181*
Motor vehicle theft	25,412	22,277	20,277	18,659*	359	322	263	274*
Steal from motor vehicle	44,590	37,435	35,809	33,603*	1,663	987	1,082	1,091*
Steal from retail store	13,985	11,763	11,413	11,528*	95	75	75	92
Steal from dwelling	13,218	12,458	10,669	10,175*	242	173	173	149
Steal from person	15,934	12,983	9,825	9,638*	722	632	543	518*
Fraud	22,895	21,063	24,694	25,071*	442	389	387	407
Other theft	32,578	29,483	26,016	23,955*	1,222	1,066	984	884*
Total theft	232,655	202,408	185,761	177,084*	5,952	4,399	4,206	3,909*

* $p < 0.05$, Kendall's non-parametric test for linear trend

store" ($p = 0.77$), "fraud" ($p=0.11$) and "steal from dwelling" ($p=0.05$). The small number of incidents in each of these groups suggests that the statistical power to detect a significant change was relatively low.

The number of recorded theft incidents in the rest of Sydney also decreased by 24 per cent between July 2002 and June 2006 from 232,655 incidents to 177,084 per annum ($p<0.001$). Every sub-category showed a significant decrease, with the exception of fraud, which showed a significant increase.

DRUG OFFENCES

Figure 3 shows the total number of recorded drug offences involving dealing/trafficking in and using/possessing cocaine, narcotics and amphetamines, in Kings Cross LAC and in the rest of Sydney over the period from January 1999 to June 2006. From mid-2001 to mid-2004 there was a clear decrease in the number of recorded drug offences in the rest of Sydney. From the end of 2004 onwards there was a levelling off in the number of incidents. In the Kings Cross LAC, there was no overall trend in either direction in the number of recorded offences for these three drug types combined.

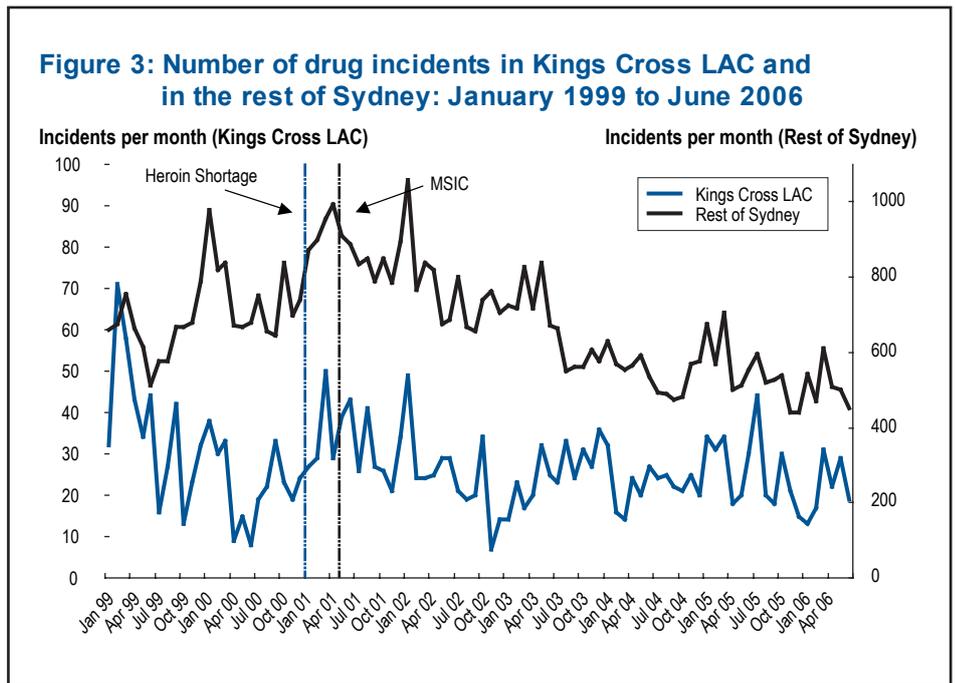


Table 3 shows the changes in the number of illicit drug incidents from July 2002 to June 2006. In the Kings Cross LAC there was no significant trend in either direction for total narcotics, amphetamines and cocaine offences. There was, however, a significant increase in dealing or trafficking in cocaine and in possessing and/or using cocaine, though the actual number of these offences was quite small. By

contrast, there was a significant decline in dealing or trafficking in narcotics. No significant changes were found over this time period in Kings Cross in possession/use of narcotics, possession/use of amphetamines or dealing/trafficking in amphetamines. There was a 38 per cent increase in amphetamine possession/use offences, most of which occurred during 2003/04, but this change was not statistically significant.

Table 3: Changes in the number of illicit drug incidents in the Kings Cross LAC and the rest of Sydney: July 2002 – June 2006

	Rest of Sydney				Kings Cross LAC			
	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06
Dealing or trafficking in cocaine	45	38	86	49	6	8	28	20*
Dealing or trafficking in narcotics	393	351	382	193*	45	68	29	28*
Dealing or trafficking in amphetamines	199	228	266	289*	28	21	28	15
Possession and/or use of cocaine	89	98	182	143*	20	19	42	36*
Possession and/or use of narcotics	707	696	631	491*	69	86	86	72
Possession and/or use of amphetamines	754	973	1,058	1,048*	78	105	91	108
Total drugs	2,187	2,384	2,605	2,213	246	307	304	279

* $p < 0.05$, Kendall's non-parametric test for linear trend

For the rest of Sydney, there was also no significant trend in either direction for total drug offences. This trend did vary by offence sub-category however. While there were significant declines in both types of narcotics offences, there were also significant increases in both types of amphetamine offences and also in possessing/using cocaine. The number of possession/use amphetamine offences increased by 38 per cent over the four-year period. Unlike the situation in Kings Cross, where the increase was concentrated in 2003/04, the increase in rest of Sydney was spread over the whole four-year period.

Given that a significant increase was found in dealing/trafficking cocaine in Kings Cross over the period 2002/03 through 2005/06, which was not evident throughout the rest of Sydney, it was decided to further examine trends in this offence in Kings Cross. Figure 4 shows the longer-term trend pattern for dealing/trafficking in cocaine in Kings Cross since 1999. From this graph a number of trends are apparent. Firstly, the rise in cocaine trafficking offences (early to mid 2005) occurred almost four years after the MSIC had commenced operations. Secondly, this increase appears to have been quite short-lived, with the number of trafficking offences per month stabilising again by early to mid 2006. Finally, it is still clearly the case that the number

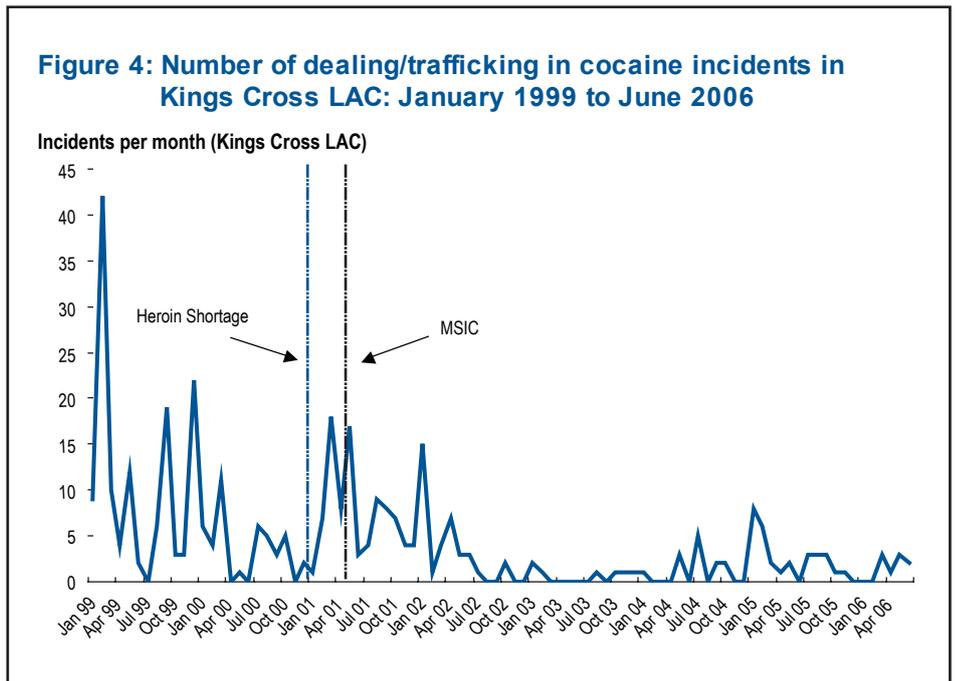
of cocaine trafficking offences in Kings Cross has been much lower over the period 2002-2006 than prior to, and in the immediate wake of, the heroin shortage in early 2001.

‘MOVE ONS’

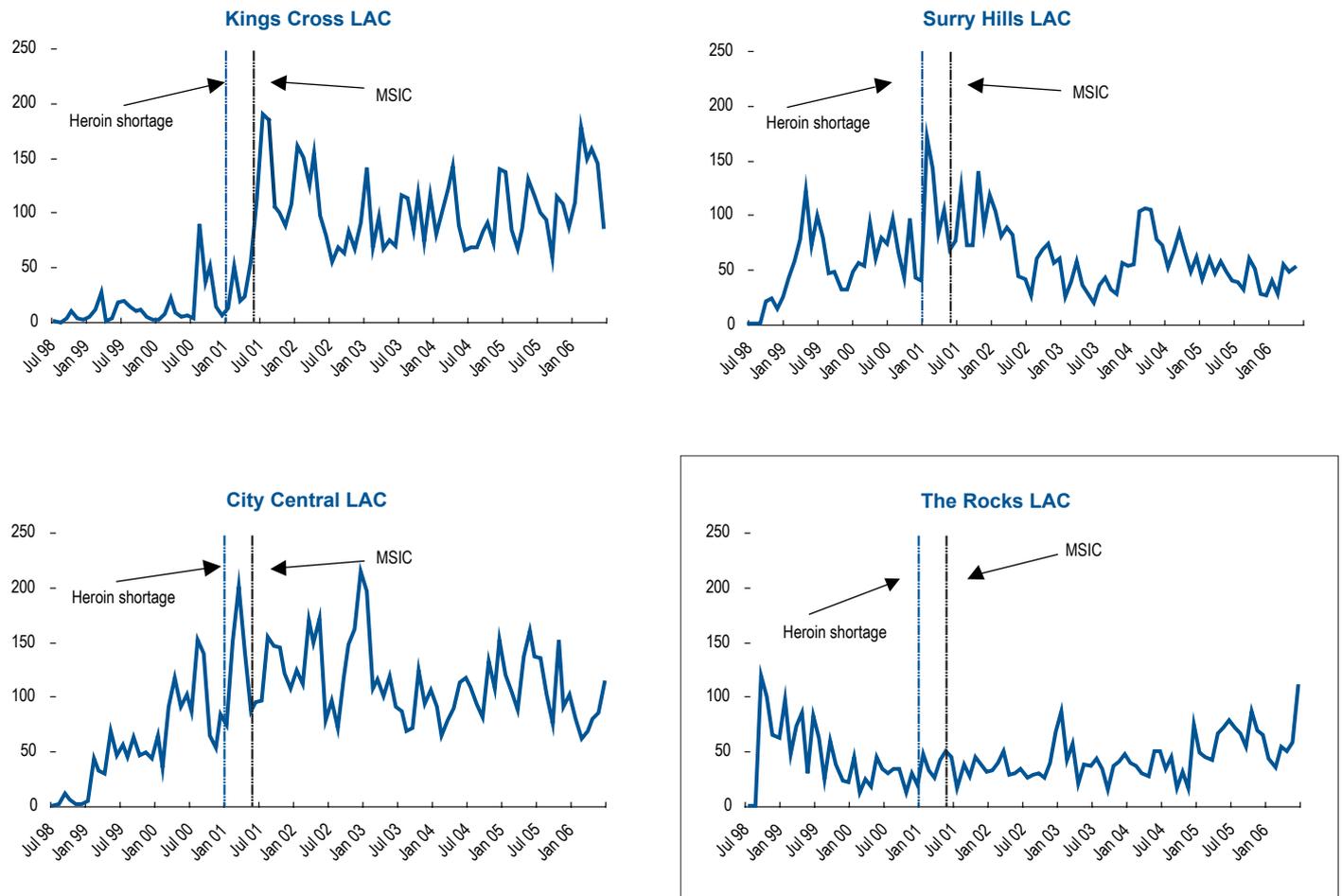
In July 1998, police in NSW were given the power to ‘move on’ individuals suspected of involvement in offences such as dealing or procuring drugs, causing obstruction to persons or traffic or harassing or intimidating others. Advice received from the Police indicates that

these ‘move ons’ are most often used in relation to drug offences. Figure 5 compares the monthly number of move on incidents in Kings Cross LAC to the numbers in City Central, Surry Hills and the Rocks LACs, over the eight-year period from July 1998 to June 2006.

There was a sharp increase in the number of ‘move on’ incidents in the Kings Cross LAC after the introduction of the MSIC in May 2001. From this point onwards, the average level of ‘move-on’ incidents remained relatively stable, though there have been some fluctuations from month to month. The City Central



Figures 5: Changes in the number of 'move on' incidents in Kings Cross, Surry Hills, City Central and The Rocks LACs: July 1998 to June 2006



LAC showed a sustained increase in the number of recorded 'move on' incidents up until the onset of the heroin shortage in early 2001. The number of 'move on' incidents in City Central LAC then remained relatively stable.

In Surry Hills LAC, the number of 'move on' incidents increased sharply after the onset of the heroin shortage and then declined twice, in the middle of 2001 and the beginning of 2002. The trend has since flattened out. The number of incidents in The Rocks LAC was much lower overall than Central Sydney and Kings Cross and more comparable to numbers in Surry Hills. There were a small number of sharp increases and decreases over the period, however the trend has been relatively flat.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

These analyses were undertaken in order to document trends in property and illicit drug-related crime in Kings Cross since the operation of the MSIC was extended in late 2002. In terms of property crime, it was found that the incidence of theft-related crimes continued to decrease in Kings Cross over this period, as it had throughout the rest of Sydney. The incidence of robbery in Kings Cross remained stable (no increase or decrease), though this was somewhat different to the rest of Sydney where robbery decreased up until June 2005 and then increased again somewhat up until June 2006. The incidence of robbery in both Kings Cross and the rest of Sydney remains lower than it was when the heroin shortage began in early 2001.

A recent report published by BOCSAR has attempted to shed some light on why rates of acquisitive crime have been falling throughout NSW in general. Moffatt, Weatherburn and Donnelly (2005) conducted multiple time series analyses to attempt to identify what factors were responsible for the decline in theft and robbery incidents throughout NSW. The number of ambulance attendances for non-fatal overdoses was found to be an independent predictor of both robbery and theft incidents, pointing to the important contributing role of the well-documented heroin shortage since early 2001 to the decline in acquisitive crime levels. However a number of other factors were also identified in this modelling. These included improvements in broad economic indicators such as lower young adult male unemployment

rates and increased consumer confidence as well as increased re-registrations for pharmacotherapy in the wake of the heroin shortage. This suggests that a range of factors in the NSW context have contributed to the sustained reduction in acquisitive crime throughout all of the State including Kings Cross.

Illicit drug offences (narcotics, cocaine and amphetamines) showed no consistent trend across types of drug in either Kings Cross or throughout the rest of Sydney. The number of recorded dealing and trafficking in narcotics offences declined in both Kings Cross and the rest of Sydney over the period mid-2002 through mid-2006. Possession/use of narcotics offences declined in the rest of Sydney but remained stable in Kings Cross. On the other hand, while the rest of Sydney showed significant increases in the recorded incidence of amphetamine offences (both dealing and possession/use), there were no significant changes in Kings Cross.

The situation with respect to cocaine was somewhat different. The numbers of recorded cocaine possession/use and cocaine trafficking offences were higher in Kings Cross in the period 2004-2006 than they were in the period 2002-2004 (i.e. when the MSIC operations were extended). The increase in recorded cases of cocaine possession/use was apparent throughout the rest of Sydney but the increase in cocaine trafficking offences was not. It is impossible to be sure what caused the increase in cocaine trafficking offences in Kings Cross but there are three reasons for doubting that the MSIC was a contributing factor. Firstly, overall numbers of recorded cocaine trafficking offences in Kings Cross were substantially higher before the opening of the MSIC than after (see Figure 4). Secondly, the increase in the number of recorded cocaine trafficking offences did not occur until some years after the MSIC opened. Thirdly, the jump in trafficking offences was short-lived, with the monthly number of these offences rising from near zero to five or six a month in the early months of 2005 and then falling back to around one to

three offences in Kings Cross in the first half of 2006.

The number of "move ons" increased markedly in Kings Cross shortly after the MSIC commenced operations in mid-2001. The growth in the use of these powers might be considered to reflect an increase in drug-related loitering following the opening of the MSIC. However, counts of loiterers and surveys conducted of Kings Cross residents after the MSIC opened show little evidence of a growth in loitering (Freeman et al. 2005). Further, surveys of Kings Cross residents over the period 2000 through 2005 found no change in the percentage of these residents who reported having been offered drugs on the street (around 44% on three survey occasions), again suggesting that the actual level of drug-related loitering in Kings Cross has not increased since the MSIC commenced operations (National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research 2006). During the key informant interviews conducted with Kings Cross Police as part of the original evaluation, participating officers stated that the MSIC had had little impact on drug dealing and that any changes in drug dealing were more likely to be a function of the Police actively targeting various sites in Kings Cross for drug dealing which may have resulted in displacement of dealing to other areas of Kings Cross (Freeman et al. 2005). A more plausible explanation for the increase in recorded "move on" directions is that police deliberately targeted suspected drug users/dealers after the MSIC opened to prevent any growth in drug-related loitering in Kings Cross. It is worth noting in this connection that a large increase in 'move ons' also occurred in the City Central LAC six months previously where no MSIC type facility was in operation.

Caution is always required when interpreting trends in police recorded crime data, due to the potential for changes in victim propensity to report crime over time or police enforcement practice to influence recorded rates of crime. The effect of the MSIC itself on crime or public health outcomes could change over time. At this stage, however, there is little reason to

believe the MSIC has had an adverse impact on recorded rates of acquisitive or drug-related crime.

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