

POLICE REPORTS OF
SERIOUS ASSAULT
IN
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BEAU OF CRIME STATISTICS AND RESEARCH

POLICE REPORTS OF SERIOUS ASSAULT IN NSW

ASSAULT REPORT No.1

Tom Robb

1987

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PREFACE

Crimes of violence are of perennial concern to the general public, to law makers, and to law enforcement agencies alike. This report seeks to provide basic information on the nature of violent assaults reported to Police, and the characteristics of both the victims and the alleged offenders in these incidents. It also examines some of the more common explanations put forward to account for recent increases in reported offences such as population growth, the increased use of weapons, and reporting increases, and finds them wanting. At least in part, these increases appear to be the result of a genuine increase in offences against the person and, as such, the report flags an issue deserving of the attention of all areas of society.

The report examines Police records of serious assault, and the Bureau's thanks are due to the Police Department's Research and Development, and Modus Operandi sections for their assistance with these records and their interpretation. The data was collected by Cora O'Sullivan, and valuable comments on the draft report were provided by Alix Goodwin and Julie Stubbs. Jackie Robinson, Tina Manoleras and Carmel Byrne typed the manuscript and Johnny Bruce prepared the artwork and graphics. The Report was edited for publication by Jan Houghton and Maria Gojski.

Dr. Jeff Sutton
Director

1. INTRODUCTION

In June 1987 the then Attorney General Mr Terry Sheahan, prompted by a continuing increase in the numbers of reports of serious assaults (other than sexual assaults) in N.S.W. in recent years (B.C.S.R., 1987), directed the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research to undertake a study of this type of offence. The purpose of the study was to be to provide information on those persons accused of serious assault, their victims, the nature of the assault itself, and possible reasons for the increase in this offence in recent years. The following report is the result of the Bureau's subsequent investigation.

Legal definitions of serious assault

According to Watson and Purnell (1986), an assault does not technically entail any actual violence, though it is frequently used in that way.

An assault is any act committed intentionally or possibly recklessly, which causes another person to apprehend immediate and unlawful violence. If force is actually applied, directly or indirectly, unlawfully or without the consent of the person assaulted, the assault becomes a battery, however slight the force. A battery may or may not include an assault. Although an assault is an independent crime and should be treated as such, for practical purposes the term "assault" is generally synonymous with "battery" and is used to mean the actual intended use of unlawful force to another person without his consent. (pp. 99 - 100)

Such usage will be continued in the present report. There is no single category of offence which corresponds exactly to the notion of "serious" assault. Assaults which involve "grievous bodily harm", "malicious wounding" or "actual bodily harm" may all involve "serious" injury to the victim but need not necessarily do so. Again, the less serious charges of "common assault", "assault child", "assault police", or "assault female"¹ might be laid even when extensive injury has been done to the victim(s). Nevertheless, it was increases in the number of reports of a group of offences, rather than increases in the number of incidents of a certain level of violence which prompted the present investigation. Thus this offence group, labelled "aggravated assault" in police statistics, will be taken as the basis of a working definition of "serious" assault.

¹These are the terms used by the police in their recording of offence reports. They are not necessarily the same as the terms used in the Legislation e.g. there is no offence called "assault female" in the Crimes Act (40,1900).

This has the advantage of greatly simplifying the methodology of the report, as the police records used in the investigation are catalogued by offence type, rather than incident severity.

"Aggravated assault" covers offences under various sections of the Crimes Act (40, 1900). These are; "wounding, with intent to do bodily harm or resist arrest" (s. 33), "maliciously wounding or inflicting grievous bodily harm" (s. 35), "causing grievous bodily harm" (s. 54), and "assault occasioning actual bodily harm" (s.59). The great majority of reports received are for s.59 assaults. For example, the present study found that in 1984, 76 per cent of all aggravated assaults were s.59 assaults, and a further 20 per cent were s.35, malicious wounding.

Some further quotes from Watson and Purnell (1986) may clarify the nature of these offences. For an incident to constitute a wounding, "there must be an injury by which the skin is broken, a mere breaking of the cuticle or upper skin is not sufficient. The breaking of internal skin, e.g. within the mouth, is sufficient" (p.64). Grievous bodily harm has its "ordinary and natural meaning of really serious bodily harm it is not necessary that the harm should be either permanent or dangerous....[it] does not apply to infection by poison or venereal disease." (p.14). Similarly, actual bodily harm should be given its "ordinary and natural meaning of actual bodily injury; the injury need not be of a permanent character nor amount to grievous bodily harm. An assault which causes an hysterical and nervous condition is an assault occasioning actual bodily harm". (p. 103)

It remains to be seen what kinds of incidents and injuries are brought under these legal rubrics in the police reports. An overview of these reports in recent years is given in the following section.

Police reports of aggravated assaults

As noted above, the number of reports of aggravated assault in New South Wales has increased markedly in the last few years. Figure 1 and Table 1 show the numbers of reports of such offences received by police each year from 1971 to 1986/87. As the figure shows, reports were fairly steady up to 1976, have increased each year since about 1977, and in the last two years (since 1984/85) have shown relatively large increases.

In contrast to the numbers of reports received, the percentage of reports of aggravated assault cleared up by police has slightly declined over this period (see Figure 2). [F= 7.32, p < 0.05, significant]. A report is said to be "cleared" by police when an information is laid against a suspect, or the alleged offender becomes "known to police" but cannot be prosecuted for some reason (e.g. suicide victims, diplomatic immunity, etc). As shown in Figure 2, the clear-up rate for aggravated assault, while remaining considerably higher than that for other offences against the person

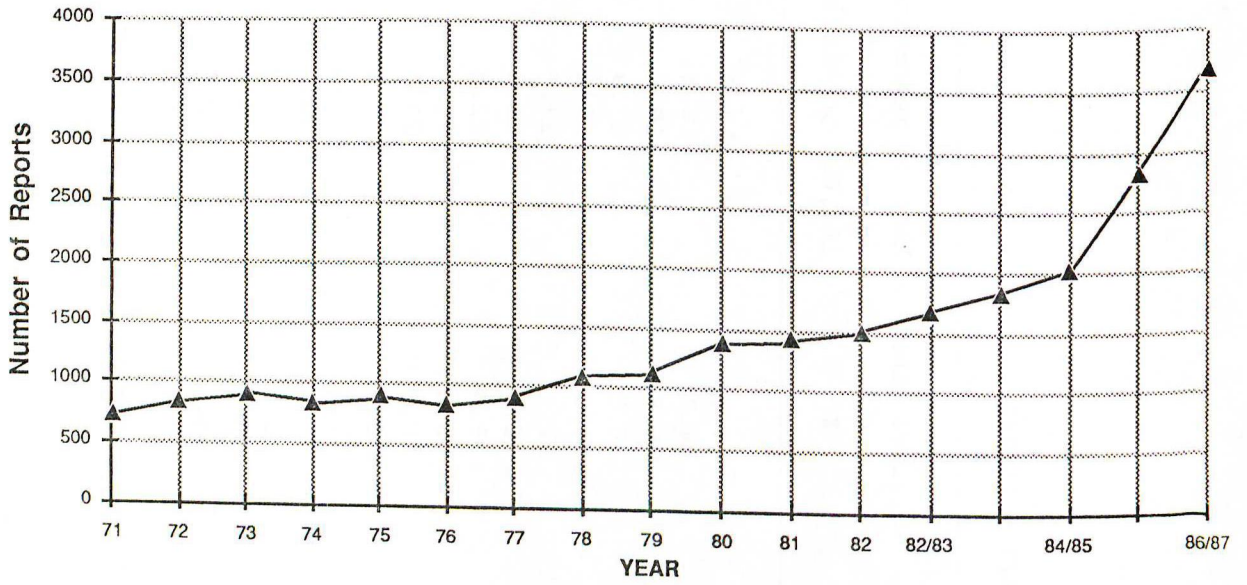
TABLE 1
Reports of offences against the person 1971 - 1986/87

Year	Aggravated assault	Other O.A.P. offences	Cleared aggravated assault %	Cleared other O.A.P. %	Rate of aggravated assault per 100,000 population
1971	727	3,359	79.4	44.0	15.8
1972	839	3,802	72.4	44.0	18.1
1973	922	3,952	71.6	49.3	19.7
1974	844	4,212	69.0	48.8	17.9
1975	906	4,862	75.6	56.9	19.1
1976	836	4,955	73.4	57.7	17.5
1977	915	5,590	77.4	58.5	18.9
1978	1,098	6,659	74.2	58.5	22.3
1979	1,133	7,011	74.4	60.0	22.7
1980	1,388	8,675	76.2	58.7	27.5
1981	1,432	8,551	74.8	53.5	27.9
1982	1,512	9,072	70.7	51.5	29.2
1982/83	1,686	11,145	70.3	51.3	32.2
1983/84	1,845	12,249	73.4	55.6	34.9
1984/85	2,033	13,143	67.8	53.3	38.0
1985/86	2,838	15,159	65.9	58.4	52.5
1986/87	3,677	17,986	67.8	61.2	66.5

FIG. 1

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT NSW 1971-1986/87

Numbers of Reports

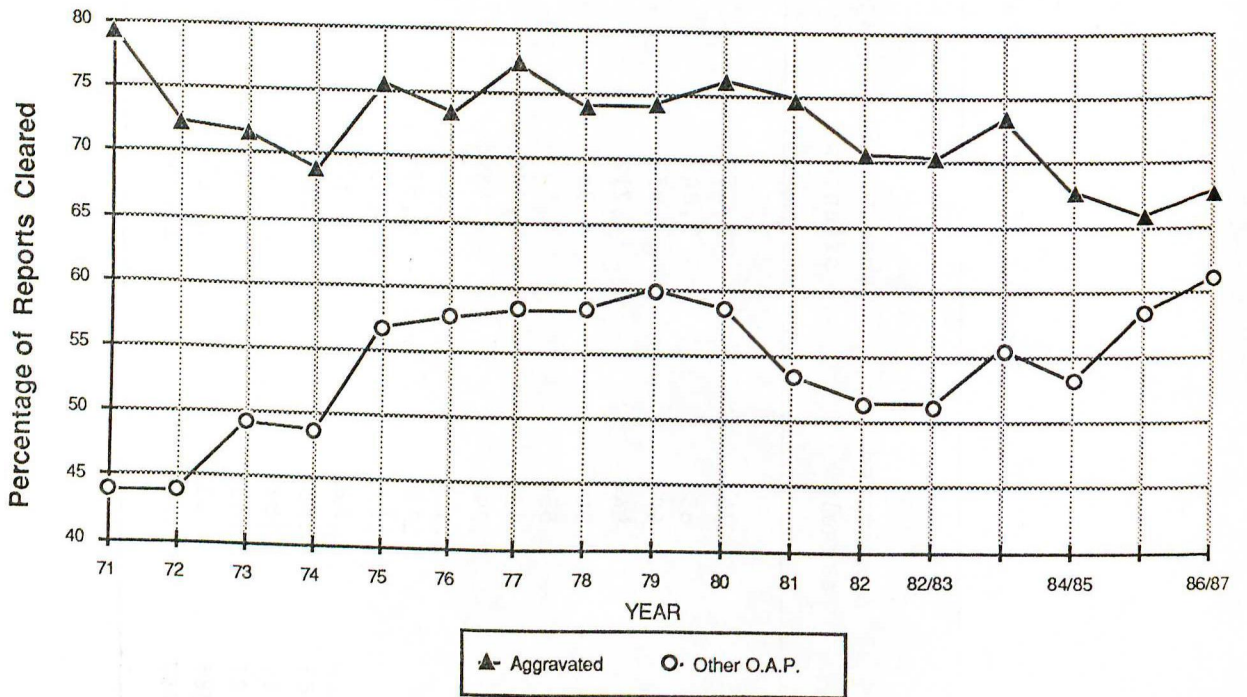


NOTE: Change from Calender to Financial years between 1982 and 1982/83

FIG. 2

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT NSW 1971-1986/87

Clear-Up Rates



NOTE: Change from Calender to Financial years between 1982 and 1982/83

(OAP), has fallen from nearly 80 per cent in 1971 to under 70 per cent in 1986/87. This contrasts with the increase in clear up rate for other OAP from under 45 per cent to about 60 per cent, over the corresponding period. These changes are not necessarily a reflection upon police efficiency but, rather, may be the result of changes in the nature of the incidents for which these types of charges are preferred. For example, a greater number of serious assaults may now be perpetrated by persons unknown to the victim, thereby lessening the chances of charges being laid by police as they will have less identifying information with which to work. This particular theory, however, is not supported by the results (see Tables 14 and 16) so other reasons will have to be found for the decline in clear up rates. Unfortunately, such a search is beyond the scope of the present research.

Methodology

The report seeks to evaluate, within the limits of the available data, a number of possible "explanations" for the increase in reports of serious assaults in N.S.W. in recent years. A number of these "explanations", are somewhat simplistic and cannot be said to be "fine grained" in the sense of providing precise, detailed, causal accounts of events. Nevertheless, any correlation between such factors and the levels of serious assault may prove to be of interest, and will also be examined.

Information to evaluate these theories was gathered from a sample of Police Incidents Reports (PIRs). A PIR is completed by police whenever an incident, from which charges may proceed, is reported to them. If subsequent information is gathered about an incident and, in particular, if an arrest is made, a further PIR will be completed if necessary, or a Police Incident and Arrest (PIA) form will be completed if appropriate. A PIA form alone, may be completed if the report of the incident co-incides with an arrest. The PIA and PIR contain similar information regarding the incident in question, the principal difference being that the PIA contains information about an alleged offender, whereas the PIR does not. An example of each form is provided in Appendix A.

A random sample of just over 500 forms were drawn for the years 1982 and 1986/87 from the records maintained on microfilm by the Police Modus Operandi Unit at Parramatta (512 from 1982 and 548 from 1986/87, a total of 1,060 forms from both years). As more than one PIR or PIA could issue from a single incident, these samples represent 419 incidents in 1982 and 436 incidents in 1986/87, a total of 855 incidents. Problems with the information gathered from these forms are discussed in the appropriate sections, below.

The general strategy of the report is to use the PIR/PIA data in two ways. Firstly, to describe the nature of the incidents reported to police, and secondly, to test a number of assertions and/or theories of why reports of serious assault have risen.

Sampling method

A list of the microfilm reference numbers of all PIRs and PIAs relating to what are termed by police (though not the legislation) "assault occasioning grievous bodily harm", "assault with malicious wounding", and "assault occasioning actual bodily harm" was obtained from the Police Department's Research and Development Branch for the years 1982 and 1986/87.² The latter year was chosen as the most recent available figures, and 1982 was chosen for being a suitable "comparison" year as it was just prior to the recent, relatively large increases in the number of reports.

The sample was selected by dividing the number of PIRs and PIAs in each year by whatever factor, x , brought the result closest to 500, the chosen sample size. Every x th record was then chosen and the information on all the PIRs/PIAs pertaining to that case was extracted and transferred to a coding form prepared by the Bureau. Thus, if there were 5,000 PIRs/PIAs listed, every tenth case was selected, and the data from it coded. This data was later punched onto computer tape and analysed on the Public Service Board's FACOM mainframe computer, using the SAS statistical package. The results of this analysis are presented below.

²"Aggravated assault" as used by police also includes "shoot with intent to cause grievous bodily harm" and "shoot with intent to prevent lawful apprehension". These alleged offences were excluded from the present sample as they were small in number (10-15 per year) and likely to be counted in other incidents in any case, if injury was done. Given the sampling technique, these cases would only have resulted in a difference of 2-3 cases, at most, in the overall sample. This is not sufficient to materially affect the results.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INCIDENTS REPORTED TO POLICE

A number of characteristics of the events which make up the alleged assaults can be gleaned from the PIRs and PIAs. These include the number, type, and location of injuries sustained and whether or not the victim attended hospital; the time, day, and location of the incident; whether or not weapons were used, or if alcohol or drugs were involved; whether or not property was stolen and/or recovered; and the respective sexes and ages of suspects and victims. The following section presents a summary of this data in order to give a general picture of the incidents under consideration and whether this picture has changed between 1982 and 1986/87.

Injuries sustained

The nature of any physical injury to each victim (the most serious injury if there were multiple wounds, as was the case in 45.6 per cent of incidents) was estimated from the PIRs/PIAs, and is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Nature of most serious injury, by year

	1982	1986/87	Total
Injury	%	%	%
None/negligible	1.37	2.19	1.79
Minor (bruises, cuts)	19.34	30.47	25.09
Serious (broken limbs, major wounds etc.)	66.41	60.95	63.58
Death	0.78	0.73	0.75
Other	0.00	1.28	0.66
Unknown	12.11	4.37	8.11
Number of reports	512	548	1,060

This table shows that the great majority of aggravated assaults involve relatively serious physical injury to the victims, though they rarely result in death. The "none/neligible" category arose because, in some cases of multiple victimisation, not every victim was injured, but a charge of aggravated assault could still be brought because of injuries to other victims of the same incident.

The major concern of this section is whether or not the alleged offences have become more serious over time. From Table 2 it would appear that there has been a growth in the proportion of minor injuries and a slight decline in serious injuries. This picture is complicated, however, by the different numbers of "unknowns" in each year, which may simply reflect different levels of recording of injuries sustained. It is more likely though, that injuries will not be noted if they are minor ones, rather than major. If so, we may assume that the "unknown" category in each year may be added to the "minor" category in order to assess any difference in injury severity between years.

If this is done, the result is a change in the proportion of minor assaults from 31.45 per cent in 1982 to 34.84 per cent in 1986/87 with the "serious" category remaining as is. Both the increase in minor injuries and the decrease in serious injuries are statistically non-significant ($z=1.27$ $p>0.05$ and $z=1.85$ $p>0.05$, respectively), suggesting that the incidents charged as aggravated assaults have, on average, remained of similar seriousness in the injuries involved.¹

This pattern is not reflected in the proportion of victims who attended hospital after the incident though, of course, such attendance is not only conditional upon the seriousness of the injury sustained. Almost one third (31.25%) of victims were recorded as attending hospital in 1982 compared with nearly half (46.53%) in 1986/87. This difference, however, most likely reflects differences in recording practices between the two years under consideration as the "unknown" category in this case fell from 32.23 per cent of victims in 1982 to 16.61 per cent in 1986/87.

Table 3 gives the location on the victim's body of the most serious injury sustained, if any.

TABLE 3
Location of most serious injury, by year

Injury	1982 %	1986/87 %	Total %
Head	66.21	68.07	67.12
Torso	13.09	13.69	13.40
Limbs	13.09	11.13	12.08
None	1.17	2.92	2.08
Unknown	6.45	4.20	5.29
Number of reports	512	548	1,060

¹Note that even if the "unknowns" are not added to the 'minor' category, the differences in major injuries between years would still be non-significant.

Clearly, the great majority of victims sustain head injuries. Given that the classification is based on the "most serious" injury, it may not be surprising that head injuries take pre-eminence over other injuries in cases where multiple injuries occur. It is of note, however, that over two-thirds (67.12 per cent) of victims were involved in incidents on which head injuries were sustained.

Time and location of incident

Insight into the nature of incidents allegedly involving aggravated assault is also provided by an examination of the spatio-temporal location of the incidents in question.

Table 4 shows the number of incidents occurring on each day of the week, broken down by year of occurrence.

TABLE 4
Day of the week of incident, by year

Day	1982	1986/87	Total
Monday	7.88	11.70	9.82
Tuesday	11.93	7.11	9.47
Wednesday	9.79	12.39	11.11
Thursday	14.80	13.76	14.27
Friday	18.62	16.28	17.43
Saturday	19.81	22.02	20.94
Sunday	16.95	15.14	16.02
Unknown	0.24	1.61	0.94
Number of incidents	419	436	855

Although there is some variation between years in the relative proportions of incidents occurring on each day, there would appear to be a general pattern of increasing incidence as the week goes on, leading to a high point on Friday and Saturday, and then tapering off again to the start of the new week. Overall, the latter half of the week (Friday to Sunday) was above the average (14.29%) proportion of reports and the first half (Mon - Wed) was below average, with Thursday being the cross-over point with almost exactly the expected proportion of reports.

As might be expected, reports are not evenly distributed throughout any given day, as shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Time of day of report, by year

Time	1982 %	1986/87 %	Total %
12am - 2am	21.00	16.29	18.60
2am - 4am	6.92	8.48	7.72
4am - 6am	1.91	2.30	2.10
6am - 8am	1.43	1.84	1.63
8am - 10am	1.91	2.98	2.46
10am - 12pm	2.35	2.07	2.22
12pm - 2pm	3.10	5.27	4.21
2pm - 4pm	5.02	5.96	5.49
4pm - 6pm	6.92	6.19	6.54
6pm - 8pm	7.16	11.24	9.24
8pm - 10pm	13.37	13.30	13.33
10pm - 12am	23.39	18.12	20.70
Unknown	5.49	5.96	5.73
Number of incidents	419	436	855

As with the day of the week figures, the number of reports increases to a peak, and then declines in a cyclic fashion as the day wears on. The low point of the day is between 6 and 8am and the number of reports per unit time rises slowly but steadily to a high between 10pm and midnight, continues from midnight to 2 am, and thereafter declines fairly rapidly. This pattern is reasonably consistent between years.

The period of the day which shows the highest number of reports is consistent with hotel and club closing times, and 40.12 per cent of incidents across years were indicated on the PIRs/PIAs as involving alcohol (55.20 per cent did not, and in 4.68 per cent of incidents it was not known if alcohol was involved). This pattern was also similar in each year.

In contrast, only 1.99 per cent of incidents were indicated as involving drugs, 96.61 per cent apparently did not involve them and in 1.29 per cent of cases it was unknown whether drugs were involved or not. This pattern, too, was consistent between years.

Location of incident

The place where the incident leading to the assault reports was alleged to have taken place is also recorded on the PIRs and PIAs. This information is summarised in Table 6. It should be noted that

incidents which actually took place in the street or in open public space were often associated with incidents outside hotels and/or clubs and the latter category is thus somewhat understated in the present figures. The principal interest in this data is to see if more incidents are occurring in the victims own home, as a result, perhaps, of domestic violence (see below).

TABLE 6
Location of incident, by year

Location	1982 %	1986/87 %	Total %
Victim's house	28.64	25.69	27.13
Other dwelling	7.40	7.80	7.60
Street	27.45	27.06	27.25
Motel/Pub etc.	19.09	19.95	19.53
Open (bush/park etc)	7.40	8.49	7.95
Institution	1.43	2.06	1.75
Other	8.35	8.72	8.54
Unknown	0.24	0.23	0.23
Number of incidents	419	436	855

Indeed, the only appreciable difference between the two years was in the percentage of alleged assaults occurring in the victim's own house. This fell by almost 3 per cent of all incidents between years. This difference was not statistically significant, however ($z = 0.97$, $p > 0.05$), and the pattern of locations appears to be fairly static for the period studied.

Use of weapon

No weapon was indicated in the majority of assaults in either year, as shown in Table 7. Where weapons were used, they were generally ones of convenience such as sticks, clubs, etc. which were readily to hand. Guns and knives were rarely used.

TABLE 7
Weapons used, by year

Location	1982	1986/87	Total
	%	%	%
None (fists, feet etc.)	58.71	66.74	62.81
Knife	11.93	6.19	9.01
Gun	4.30	2.75	3.51
Other	21.72	21.79	21.75
Unknown	3.34	2.52	2.92
Number of incidents	419	436	855

If the numbers of all weapons used is pooled, the result is that weapons were used in 37.95 per cent of cases in 1982 and 30.73 per cent of cases in 1986/87. This decline in the use of weapons was statistically significant ($z = 2.22$, $p < 0.05$).

Property Stolen

As might be expected from the fact that the incidents in the present sample of reports were rarely concerned with robbery (see below) the number of incidents in which property was stolen was very small. Property was stolen in only 1.91 per cent of incidents in 1982 and 1.38 per cent of incidents in 1986/87, for an overall total of 1.64 per cent of incidents. These numbers of incidents are too small to warrant further analysis, but the rarity with which property is stolen suggests it is not the motive for the great majority of alleged aggravated assaults or, where it is, a different charge (such as assault and rob) is used.

Sex of victim vs. sex of suspect

One possible source of aggravated assault reports are incidents of "domestic" violence. This area is discussed more fully below, but some preliminary light may be thrown on the prevalence of domestic assaults by examining the proportions of suspects and victims of each sex. A high proportion of alleged assaults by men on women might indicate the prevalence of "domestic" (i.e. in the sense of inter-spousal) assaults, whereas if the alleged assaults are within sexes, other forms of altercation may be the dominant ones. Table 8 shows the sex of victims by sex of suspects for each year under study.

TABLE 8
Sex of suspect vs sex of victim, by year

Suspect's sex	Victim's sex	1982 %	1986/87 %	Total %
Male	Male	66.21	69.16	67.74
Male	Female	17.00	19.34	18.21
Male	Unknown	2.34	1.46	1.89
Female	Female	3.13	3.83	3.49
Female	Male	2.54	2.19	2.36
Female	Unknown	0.78	0.36	0.57
Unknown	Male	7.62	2.92	5.19
Unknown	Female	0.39	0.73	0.57
Number of reports		512	548	1,060

These figures indicate that reports of aggravated assault almost always concern male suspects. Almost 90 per cent of suspects in each year were male (85.55 per cent in 1982 and 89.96 per cent in 1986/87); as were over three quarters of all victims (76.37 per cent in 1982 and 74.24 per cent in 1986/87). At least two-thirds of reports in each year are the result of altercations between males. Less than one-fifth of assaults are by males on females, a fact which suggests that "domestic" violence may not be as common as other types of disputes in the aggravated assault reports (see below).

The pattern of results is very similar in each year. The small increase (17.00 per cent to 19.34 per cent) in male to female alleged assaults was not statistically significant, ($z=0.98$, $p>0.05$), and may thus be due simply to sampling error.

Ages of victims and suspects

The age of the victims of alleged aggravated assaults are usually recorded on the PIRs and PIAs. This is of interest since it may serve to further confirm or, alternatively, to undercut, the picture that such assaults are the result of fights between similar males, rather than, for example, being the result of fathers allegedly assaulting their sons.

Table 9 shows the age of the victim by the age of the suspect. For simplicity of exposition, and because there appeared to be little difference in age distributions between years, the results for both years have been combined in Table 9.

TABLE 9
Age of suspect by age of victim
(as percentage of total suspect-victim pairs)

Age of suspect	Age of victim								Total	
	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Unknown		
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
0-9	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
10-19	0.56	7.74	3.77	1.13	1.04	0.28	0.75	3.11	18.41	
20-29	0.94	4.16	13.79	5.10	2.27	1.89	1.79	6.42	36.36	
30-39	0.47	0.76	4.06	3.31	1.42	0.76	0.57	2.64	13.98	
40-49	0.18	0.85	0.94	1.98	1.32	0.57	0.38	1.42	7.65	
50-59	0.00	0.09	0.19	0.09	0.19	0.09	0.28	0.19	1.13	
60+	0.00	0.28	1.51	0.47	0.00	0.28	0.00	0.19	2.74	
Unknown	0.00	3.31	7.27	3.87	1.42	1.04	0.76	2.08	19.74	
Total percent	2.17	17.19	31.54	15.96	7.65	4.91	4.53	16.05	100.0	

*Number of suspect - victim pairs - 1,060.
**Rows and columns may not sum to totals due to rounding errors.

As Table 9 shows, not only are the 20 - 29 year olds the most commonly represented group in the suspect figures, but they are similarly represented among the victims of aggravated assault. In at least the "offence prone" younger age groups, alleged assault most commonly occurs between people of the same or similar ages. Thus, for example, 10 - 19 year olds (80 per cent of these alleged assaults are between 15-19 year olds), and 20 - 29 year olds are allegedly assaulted by other 20 - 29 year olds in the main. Together these two groups account for 54.77 per cent of suspects and 48.73 of victims. All other victim age groups are most often allegedly assaulted by 20 - 29 year olds, but with a sizeable proportion of other age groups involved. Overall, these figures suggest that aggravated assault charges will mainly result from altercations between fairly young men, usually of similar ages, but with a smaller proportion of alleged assaults by 20 - 29 year olds upon those both younger, and older, than themselves.

Summary

The majority of aggravated assault reports arise from altercations between men. They most commonly occur on Fridays and Saturdays, and between the hours of 10 pm and midnight. The favoured locations are in the victims own house or in and around hotels and clubs. Alcohol was involved in about 40 per cent of cases, but drugs in less than 2 per cent of cases. Weapons were not used in over 60 per cent of incidents, and when used, were mostly weapons of convenience, rather than guns or knives. Victims sustained serious wounds in about two-thirds of cases, usually to the head, and sustained multiple wounds in nearly half of all incidents (46 per cent). Property was rarely taken as a result of these alleged assaults.

The motives for the alleged assaults, and some possible explanations for the increase in reports of this nature in recent years are the subject of the next section.

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FOOTNOTES

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3. POSSIBLE SOURCES OF INCREASES IN REPORTS OF AGGRAVATED ASSAULT

Population growth

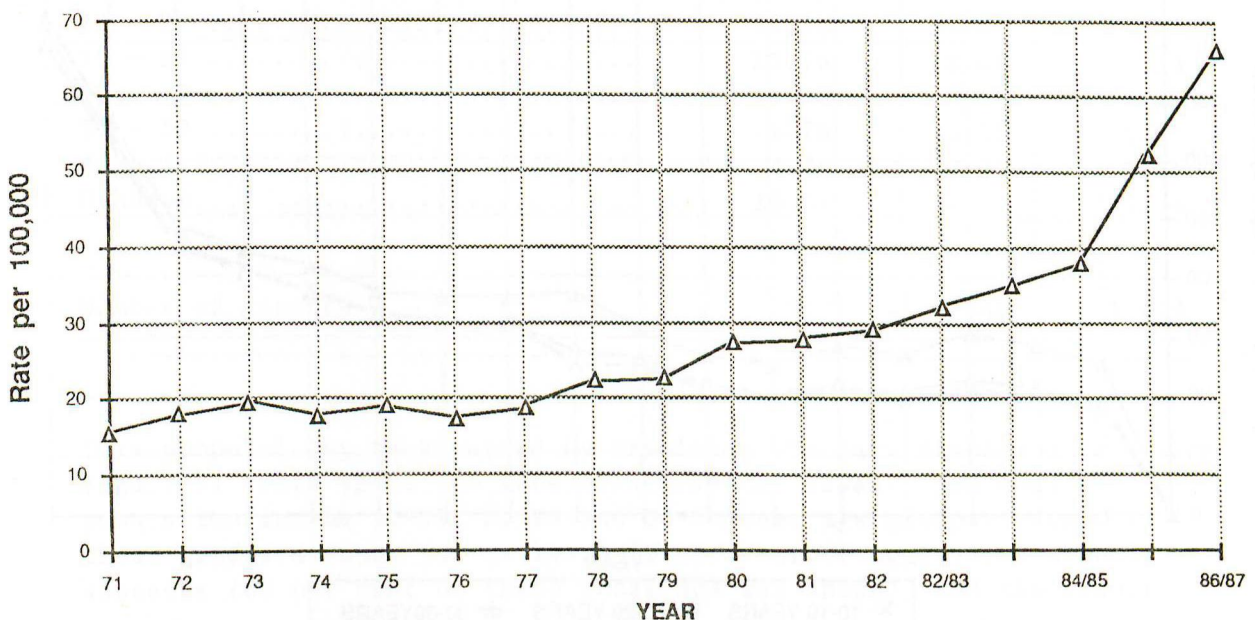
The recent increases in the number of reports of aggravated assault (noted above), are not accounted for by a corresponding increase in the population of N.S.W.

The number of reports of such assaults per 100,000 head of population is shown in Figure 3. These rates per head of population figures effectively remove the influence of increasing population from the results but, as the figure shows, the rate of reports has increased in a similar fashion to the absolute number of those reports (c.f. Fig. 1).

It should be noted that population figures for N.S.W. were obtained from Census figures for 1971, 1976, 1981 and 1986. Figures for the years between Censuses were simply smooth interpolations between the adjacent Census figures, a procedure condoned by ABS. The figure for 1986/87 was the ABS estimate of the N.S.W. population of 30 June, 1986, the most recent available. It is clear from Figure 3 that population increases alone cannot explain the recent increases in reports.

FIG. 3

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT NSW 1971- 1986/87
Reports per 100,000 population



NOTE: Change from Calendar to Financial years between 1982 and 1982/83

FIG 4.
PROPORTION OF SUSPECTS IN EACH AGE GROUP

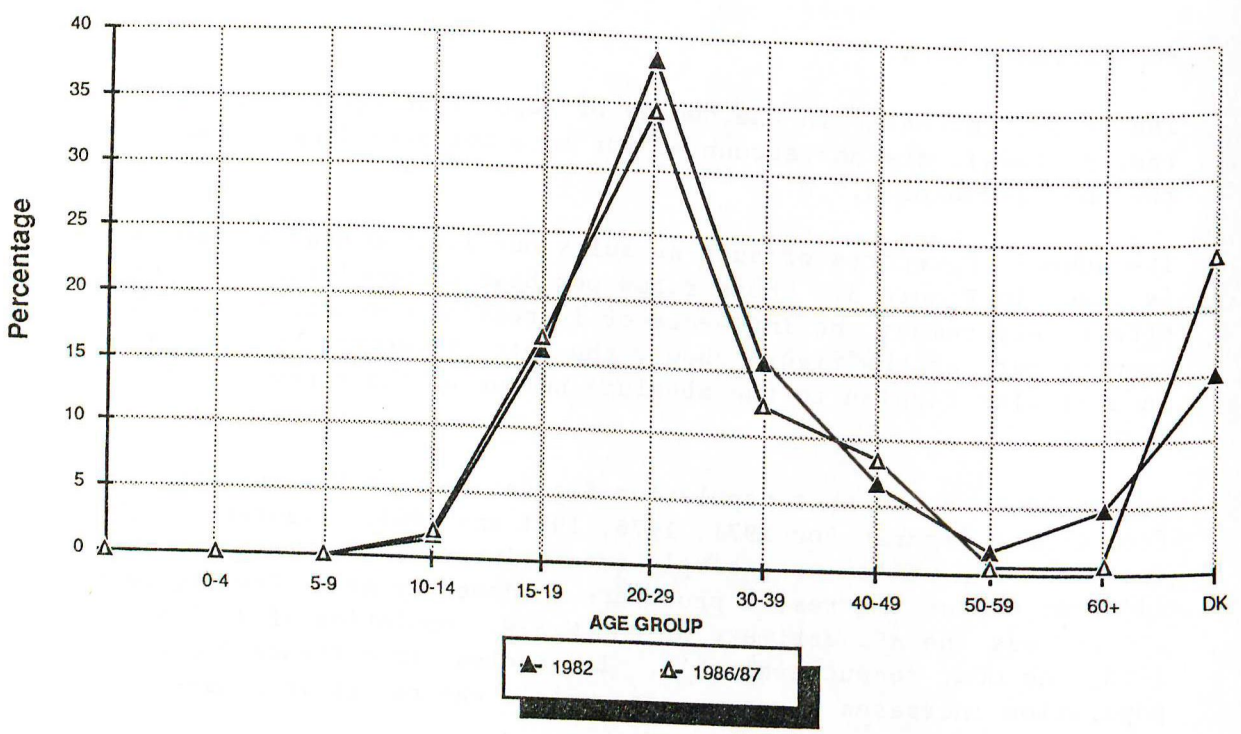
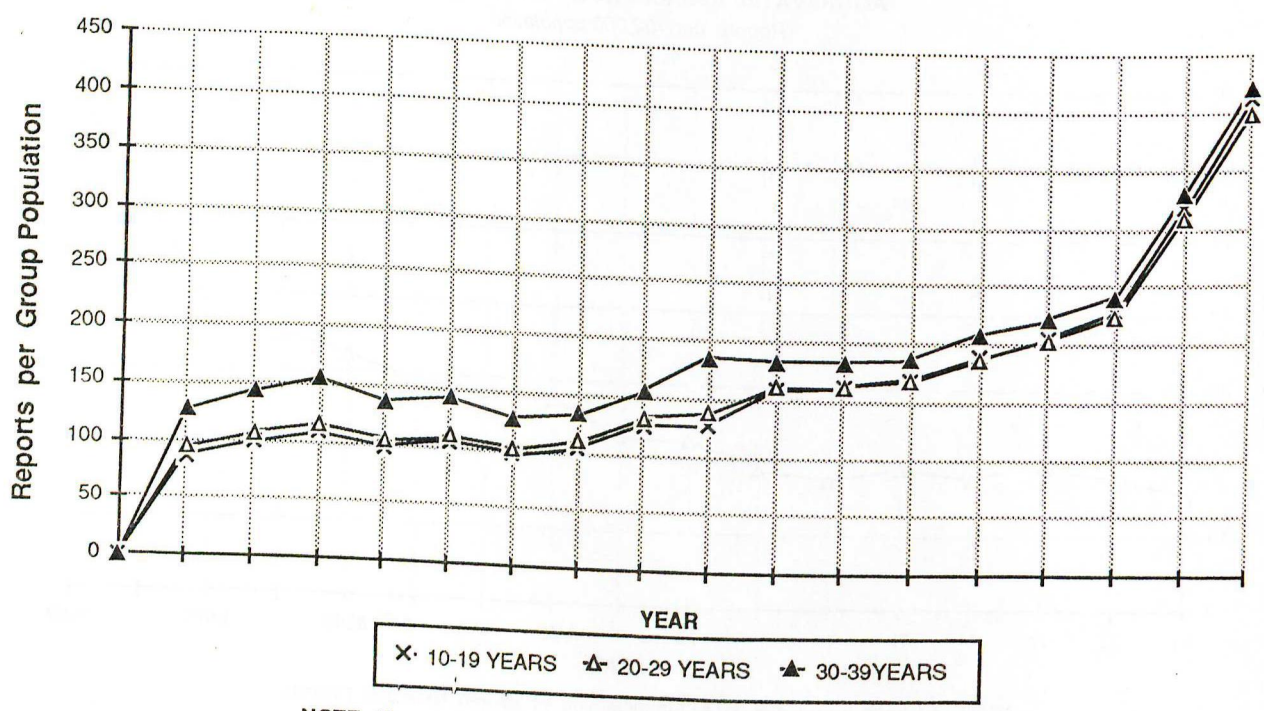


FIG. 5
TOTAL REPORTS OF AGGRAVATED ASSAULT
DIVIDED BY SELECTED AGE GROUPS



NOTE: Change from Calender to Financial years between 1982 and 1982/83

Increases in offence prone age groups

One possibility is that, although overall population increases are insufficient to explain increases in reports, there may be larger increases in the age groups from which suspects are most commonly drawn (see above).

Table 10 shows the percentage of suspects in each age group for the years 1982 and 1986/87 as shown in the PIR/PIA data. This data is presented graphically in Figure 4. From these figures, it would appear that there was little difference in the two years in the proportion of suspects in each age group. The most common group in both years was the 20 - 29 year olds, followed by the 10-19 year olds (combining the 10-14 and 15-19 age groups), and the 30 - 39 year olds.

From this, it might be suggested that changing numbers of the most commonly arrested age groups in the population might be used to "explain" the increases in aggravated assault reports. For example, although the "baby boom" generation has now largely moved through the age groups mentioned above, the children of that generation (the so-called "baby boom echo"), are now entering those age groups and thus creating an increase in the most "assault prone" sector of the population.

TABLE 10
Age of suspects, by year

Age	1982	1986/87	Total
10 - 14	1.57	2.01	1.79
15 - 09	16.05	17.15	16.62
20 - 29	38.36	34.49	36.36
30 - 39	15.66	12.41	13.98
40 - 49	6.65	8.58	7.65
50 - 59	1.76	0.55	1.13
60+	4.89	0.73	2.74
Unknown.....	15.07	24.09	19.74
Number of reports	512	548	1,060

This proposal may be assessed by examining the data displayed in Figure 5. This shows the rate of aggravated assault per head of population in the 10-19, 20-29 and 30-39 year age groups. Together these groups account for at least 75 per cent of aggravated assault suspects (83 per cent of those whose age was known), and the result

of dividing the number of reports by the number of persons in these age groups is to remove the effect of any change in the size of these age groups.

It is important to note that Figure 5 does not show the actual rates of reported offences among the various age groups. No effort was made to apportion the reports between the suspects' age groups, as this apportioning was unnecessary for the present purposes. A more appropriate indication of the relative rates of alleged offending is given in Figure 4. What is of interest here is the slope of the graph shown in Figure 5. If the graph is level, then increases in reports might be explained simply by increases in the population groups, and such appears to be the case up until about 1977. Since that date, however, the rates per age-specific population have increased, and this increase would appear to be accelerating.

Thus, a rise in the rate of reports per person indicates an increase in reports over and above any increase in population age groups. This is clearly the case in Figure 5 and, therefore, the "demographic change" explanation of the recent large increases in aggravated assault cannot be sustained though, of course, such changes may account for some small part of that increase.

Increases in specific types of assaults

It is possible that increases in aggravated assault reports are confined to alleged offences arising in certain types of situations, such as gang disputes, domestic violence, or "muggings".

The latter are more fully discussed in a Bureau report on Robbery (B.C.S.R., 1987b), but a number of charges of aggravated assaults may have arisen in that context, and will be discussed here, as appropriate.

Domestic violence

In the "Summary and Background Notes" to the 1986 - 87 Crime Statistics, the Police Department of N.S.W., in considering the overall increase in offences against the person, argues:

"Almost one third... of the increase in this category was attributed to recorded domestic assaults - assaults in dwellings. An increase in the reporting of domestic assaults was anticipated as victims and police became more familiar with the provisions of the crime (Domestic Violence) Amendment Act 1983, which was introduced to provide increased assistance to victims of domestic violence investigation and enforcement of the law by encouraging a greater reportability of domestic assault." (p. 2).

It is of interest, then, to see if a similar pattern emerges in the specific category of aggravated assaults, or whether any increase in domestic violence reports is confined to the less serious, non-aggravated assault categories.

Data on the circumstances of the alleged offence was gathered, in the main, from the "Narrative" section of the PIRs and PIAs. Incidents were grouped according to the single coder's¹ judgement of the nature of the incident, rather than by whether or not it occurred in a dwelling - the definition of "domestic" suggested in the police "Summary" (above).

Table 11 shows the type of circumstances of each incident by year. Note that the number of incidents is less than the number of reports shown in the preceding sections. This is because more than one report may issue from in a single incident.

The table shows that the proportion of aggravated assault which arise in domestic situations apparently declined slightly between 1982 and 1986/87. In addition, "domestic" assaults form only a minority of aggravated assault reports (about 20 per cent). This is consistent with the data on the respective sexes of victims and suspects, discussed above, in which the majority of attacks are by males, on other males.

TABLE 11
Type of incident, by year

Type	1982	1986/87	Total
	%	%	%
Robbery	3.82	2.98	3.39
Sexual assault	2.15	1.15	1.64
Domestic	21.24	19.96	20.59
Other altercation	48.93	47.71	48.30
Gang dispute	4.30	11.47	7.95
"Horse play"	0.95	2.29	1.64
Arrest	1.91	1.38	1.64
Other	0.48	0.92	0.70
Unknown	16.23	12.16	14.16
Number of incidents	419	436	855

¹A single coder was used for all forms to eliminate inter-coder variability in coding. Differences between groups are not, therefore, confounded with different rater's judgements, and are more likely to be due to real differences in the data.

This difference in the relative proportion of domestic violence assaults was not statistically significant ($z = 0.46$, $p > 0.05$). Thus the apparent decline in domestic violence may simply be due to sampling variance.

Another potential source of error is one of measurement. When it was not clear from the limited information given on the PIR/PIAs exactly what were the circumstances leading to a report, the case was coded as "unknown" ie. the circumstances could not be reliably determined. The percentage of "unknowns" declined from 16.2 per cent in 1982 to 12.2 per cent in 1986/87, so it may be that, as more cases are able to be allocated to the various other categories, the relative proportion of domestic assaults declined.

This argument, however, suggests that there are disproportionately more incidents being allocated from the "unknown" to categories of assault other than domestics. If so, this should increase the relative proportion of "domestic" incidents remaining in the "unknown" category.

While of course, this cannot be tested directly since that data is not available (by definition), the number of incidents in the "unknown" category which took place in the victim's house (or other dwelling) and the sex of the victims gives some indication of the potential numbers of "domestic" incidents remaining in the "unknown" category in each year.

The code "domestic" would most commonly have been attached to a matter in which a female was attacked in her own house by a male but, unfortunately, only 11 of the 68 "unknown" in 1982 involved females and only four of these occurred in the victim's residence. In 1986/87, only six incidents involved females and one occurred in the victim's house. These numbers are too small to allow reliable interpretation or statistical analysis, but would appear to be insufficient in absolute terms to account for any supposed fall in the number of domestic incidents between the two years studied.

The narrative portion of the PIRs and PIAs was used to estimate the nature of the social relationship (if any) between the victim(s) and suspect(s). Unfortunately the information on this point is often very sparse and, in general, will tend to underestimate the degree of relationship between the two persons involved. Thus, in the following analysis, if a relationship could not be clearly decided, it was coded as "no prior relationship". This does not necessarily mean that the persons concerned were total strangers, merely that no positive relation could be established from the report in the PIA.

Those cases in which no suspect was charged, or no suspect became known to police are excluded from Table 12, which shows the relationship between 370 victim-suspect pairs involved in 309 incidents in 1982, and between 400 victim-suspect pairs involved in 325 incidents in 1986/87.

TABLE 12
Relationship of victims to suspects, by year

Type	1982	1986/87	Total
	%	%	%
Friend/acquaintance	27.03	38.50	32.99
Spouse/lover/defacto	12.43	13.50	12.99
Other family	7.57	7.50	7.53
Neighbours	1.35	1.00	1.17
No prior relationship	51.62	39.50	45.32

As expected from the analysis of "domestic" assaults, above, the percentage of persons who allegedly assaulted their spouse, lover, or de facto spouse was small relative to other relationship categories, and was similar in both years.² The main changes between years appears to be a movement from the "no prior relationship" category to the "friend/acquaintance" category, with other groups remaining stable. These differences, however, were not tested for statistical significance for two reasons. Firstly, the relevant hypotheses were not specified a priori and the tests are therefore invalidated. Secondly, even if the test could be done, it would eliminate only sampling error and not measurement error from the result. But these two groups are precisely those between which differentiation in coding was most difficult. Thus, the apparent difference between years is most likely an artefact of the coding process based on the limited PIA information available.

In summary, it would appear that domestic assaults are not responsible for the increase in reports of aggravated assault. If reporting, (or, indeed, incidence) of such alleged offences has increased, as is suggested by the police analysis quoted above, then the effect may be confined to charges of "non-aggravated" assault, or to other parts of the category of "offences against the person".

Gang disputes

As noted above in Table 12, the proportion of reports involving gang disputes rose from 4.3 per cent in 1982 to 11.47 per cent in 1986/87. This difference is not reliable, however, as the number of incidents is too small to permit statistical testing.

Of related interest is the number of suspects and victims involved in each incident. Information on the numbers of victims and suspects per incident is given in Table 13.

²The difference was not tested for statistical significance as such a test would be spurious, given the level of uncertainty in the coding of this item.

TABLE 13
Victims and suspect numbers, by year

Number of suspects	Number of victims	1982 %	1986/87 %	Total %
One	one	73.51	69.72	71.58
One	multiple	5.49	6.65	6.08
Multiple	one	12.41	16.06	14.27
Multiple	multiple	4.30	7.11	5.73
None	one	3.58	0.46	1.99
None	multiple	0.72	0.00	0.35
Number of incidents		419	436	855

From this, it would appear that the great majority (71.58%) of the altercations are between individuals, though about one-fifth (20.0%) involved multiple alleged assailants. The pattern is similar in both years.

"Muggings"

A number of charges of aggravated assault appear to have arisen as a result of robbery or attempted robbery (see Table 13, above). The proportion of such incidents is small, however, being only 3.82 per cent in 1982 and 2.98 per cent in 1986/87. This is consistent with the small proportion of incidents in which property was stolen (1.91 per cent in 1982 and 1.38 per cent in 1986/87).

Thus, although a number of incidents occurred in the street, and a sizeable proportion of victim to suspect relationships were non-obvious (see above), it would appear that few of the reports of aggravated assault involve "muggings" (i.e. street robbery by a stranger) in either year studied. Such incidents would probably usually be charged as "steal from person" or "robbery".

Overall, the most common context in which aggravated assault occurred was an altercation (for some range of unknown reasons), rather than robbery, sexual assault, or even domestic violence, though the latter was the second most common source of reports.

In general, there is little difference in any of these incident categories between years. Certainly none of small differences present in the data can be regarded as statistically reliable. Thus, the source of the growth in aggravated assault reports in recent years cannot be found in the growth of any particular category of

incidents. Rather, it would appear that all categories of alleged assault have increased in absolute terms, not one or more at the expense of the others.

The following table shows the number of incidents reported in each category for the years 1970 through 1974. The total number of incidents reported in each year is also shown. The data indicates that the number of incidents reported in each category has generally increased over the period, and that the total number of incidents reported has also increased.

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Incident, dated 11/11/1994, at the residence of the complainant, 11111 11th Street, San Diego, California 92131. The complainant reported that on 11/11/1994, at approximately 11:00 AM, she was at home and was being sexually assaulted by a male individual. The complainant stated that she was unable to identify the suspect.

The complainant stated that she was alone at the time of the incident and that she was in her bedroom. She stated that she was sexually assaulted by a male individual who entered her bedroom and forced her to have sexual intercourse with him. She stated that she was unable to identify the suspect and that she was very frightened during the incident. She stated that she called the police immediately after the incident and that she was taken to a hospital for medical attention.

The complainant stated that she was very upset and that she was having difficulty sleeping and eating. She stated that she was very scared and that she was very nervous. She stated that she was very sad and that she was very angry. She stated that she was very embarrassed and that she was very ashamed. She stated that she was very depressed and that she was very lonely. She stated that she was very lonely and that she was very sad.

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Changes in reporting of alleged offences

One issue which can never be divorced from the police statistics on reported offences, is whether any change in the number of reports is due to a change in the number of incidents occurring, or simply due to a change in the level of reporting of those offences to police. It is possible that aggravated assaults are occurring at much the same level as they always have in the community, but that recent increases in reported offences are due to the greater willingness of victims to report the offence to police, creating an apparent "increase in crime" for which there is no real justification. This issue cannot be finally resolved without the use of annual surveys of the level of unreported crime, such as those conducted in the United States and which are used there in preference to police figures as the basis of the estimate of the levels of crime actually occurring. If such data was available in N.S.W., it would be possible to see whether or not change in police reports coincided with a similar change in reporting levels.

Unfortunately, such annual information is unavailable, although the Australian Bureau of Statistics has conducted two such "victimisation" surveys, in 1975 and 1983. These two surveys were structured differently, however, and so their results are not strictly comparable with each other, thus no information on trends in reporting levels can be reliably deduced from these surveys. Considering only the more recent survey (ABS, 1985), since it alone was conducted during the period under study, about one-third (33.6%) of all assault incidents were reported to police. This may, however, underestimate the level of reporting of the more serious aggravated assaults which are the subject of the report, as more serious offences are more likely to be reported to police.¹ This suggests that there may be sufficient scope within the unreported assaults for the recent increase in reports to be due to increased reporting to police, rather than necessarily due to increases in the incidence of offending.

If this proposal were correct, however, it might reasonably be expected that the proportion of offences reported by the victims should increase, and the proportion "detected" by police should fall. This is because the number of incidents remains constant, but there is greater relative involvement of victims in reporting of offences, thereby reducing the proportion detected through direct police involvement even if the numbers of incidents thus detected remains constant. It is possible, of course, that police detection rates have increased on a par with increases of reporting and that, therefore, relative proportions will not change. This possibility is, however, highly unlikely. No improvements in police detections of assaults have been reported nor have clear up rates for this offence remained stable which might have been expected had the proportion of detected offences remained constant.

¹For example, 50.6% of people who did not report the assault did so because they felt the incident was too "trivial" (ABS, 1985, p. 53), suggesting that, had it been more serious, they would have reported it.

Table 14 shows the source of the police reports, as recorded on the PIRs and PIAs in the current sample. Clearly, the conclusion drawn from the theory of increased reporting cannot be sustained, as the proportions of offences reported by victims and detected by police has remained almost constant between 1982 and 1986/87.

TABLE 14
Reporter of alleged offences, by year

Reporter	1982	1986/87	Total
	%	%	%
Police	5.49	5.73	5.61
Victim	68.74	69.04	68.89
Other	23.39	18.35	20.82
Unknown	2.39	6.88	4.68
Number of incidents	419	436	855

It does not necessarily follow from this, however, that the recent increase in aggravated assault reports represents an accurate picture of any change in the level of the incidence of offences.² The above analysis assumes that a given type of incident will be charged by police in a constant fashion. That is, a certain type of incident will always attract a charge of, say, assault occasioning actual bodily harm rather than, say, common assault. It is possible, however, that this assumption is not met.

For example, it may be the case that the number of reports of alleged assaults which would normally have attracted a "non - aggravated" charge has increased, but an increasing proportion of these have now been redefined by police, and are attracting an "aggravated" charge. This possibility is the subject of the following section.

Changes in the operational definition of aggravated assault

If the number of all reported offences against the person (OAP) were constant from year to year, then an apparent increase in aggravated assaults could be produced by having an increasing proportion of OAP reports defined as "aggravated". The number of OAP reports, however, is not constant (see Figure 6) but is increasing each year.

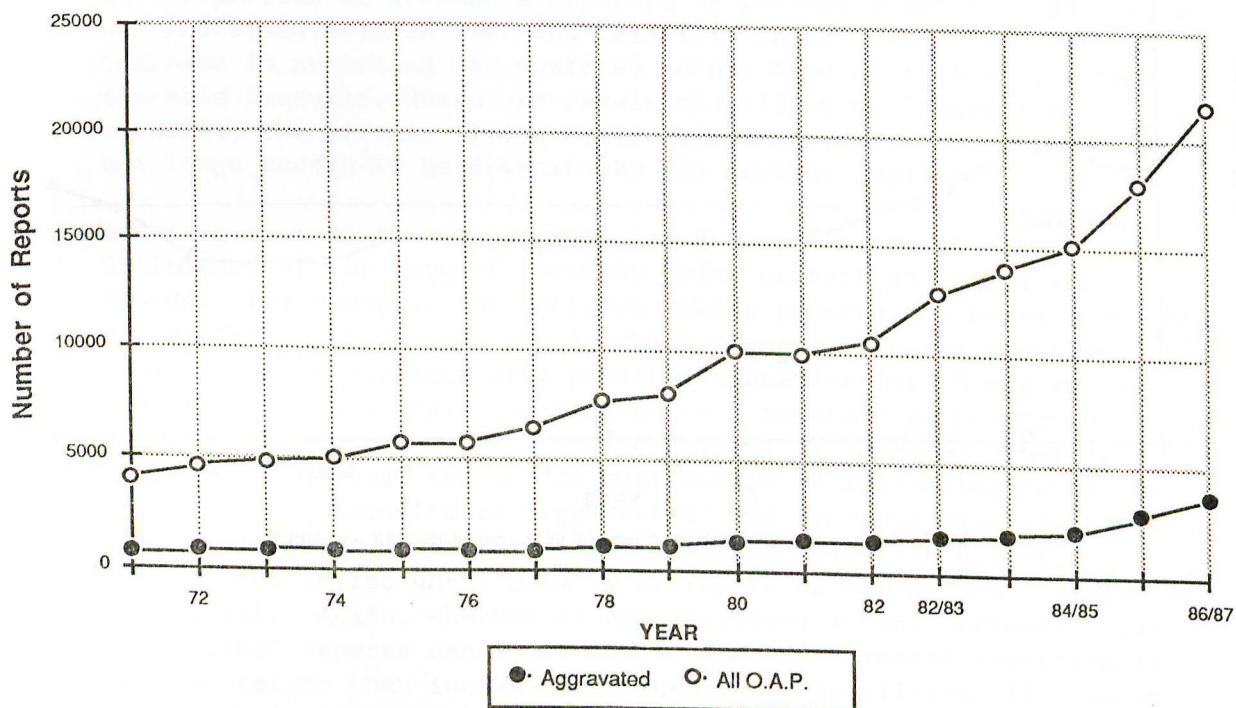
²It is worth noting that, even if the number of actual offences have increased, Table 16 suggests that increased policing (or police numbers) would be an ineffective counter to this increase, as these offences are overwhelmingly reported by the public, rather than "detected" by police.

Therefore, a constant definition of "aggravated assaults" (i.e. the same proportion of OAP defined as such in each year) would be sufficient to produce an increase in this category.

FIG. 6

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT AND ALL OFFENCES AGAINST THE PERSON

Number of Reports 1971 - 1986/87

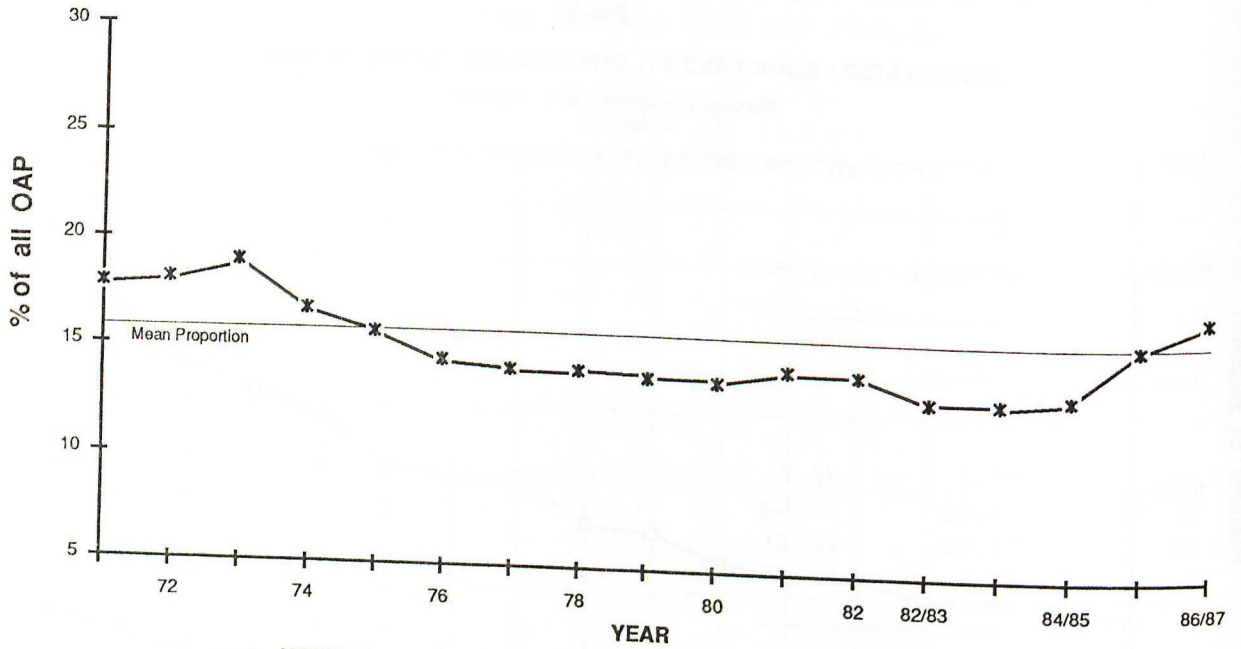


NOTE: Change from Calendar to Financial years between 1982 and 1982/83

The actual relationship between the number of OAP reports and the proportion of these which are classified as "aggravated assault" reports is more complex, however, being a U-shaped function over time (see Figure 7). Figure 7 shows, in effect, the number of aggravated assault reports per 100 OAP reports received. It thus ignores changes in the level of OAP reports over time, and shows that until the mid-eighties, the rate of aggravated assault reports per 100 OAP reports was declining. Since 1984/85, this trend has been reversed, and aggravated assault has increased as a percentage of all OAP reports, though not to the levels of the early 1970s. Despite these small variations in the percentage of reports classified as "aggravated", the assumption that a constant percentage of reports, say 15.2% (the mean percentage over the period studied), are thus classified is sufficient to account for the recent increase in these reports, given the recent increases in reports for all offences against the person. As shown in Figure 8, such an assumption would predict numbers of aggravated assault reports close to those actually received ($r = 0.97$, Regression $F = 284.6$, $p < 0.05$, significant). Thus, it is not necessary to assume that Police have systematically varied their definition of "aggravated" assault in order to explain recent increases in such reports. Some further speculation on police decision making in this regard is offered below.

FIG.7

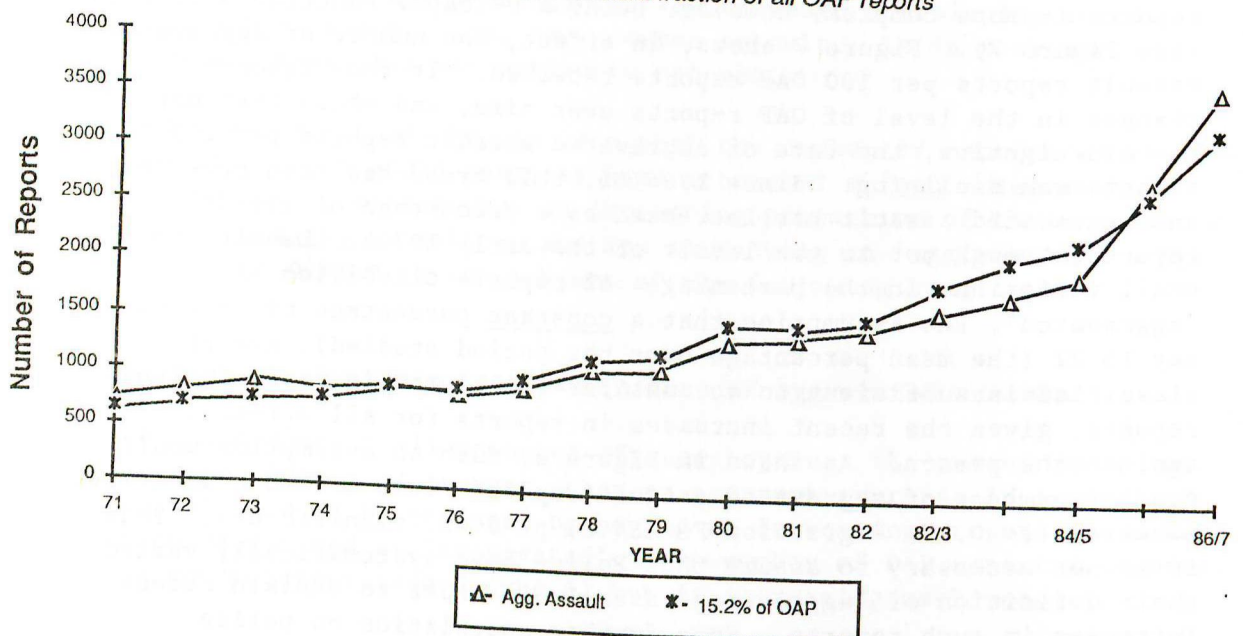
AGGRAVATED ASSAULT NSW 1971-1986/87
Aggravated Assaults as % of all O A P



NOTE: Change from Calender to Financial years between 1982 and 1982/83

FIG. 8

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT REPORT
Compared with a constant fraction of all OAP reports



NOTE: Change from Calender to Financial years between 1982 and 1982/83

The upshot of the present discussion is that, although an increase in reporting of serious assaults is unlikely to be the direct source of increases in recorded aggravated assaults, an increase in the reporting of assaults in general, coupled with a stable definition of "serious" assault by police, would account for the recent levels of "aggravated assault" reports. Such a theory, however, is still inconsistent with the results shown in Table 16, which showed that the proportion of incidents reported by persons other than police had not increased between 1982 and 1986/87. On the other hand, if the increase in reporting was confined to one type of incident, such as domestic assaults, which are rarely classified as "aggravated" assaults, the effects of increased reporting may be nonexistent, or not large enough to be detected by the methods employed.

A consequence of this hypothesis is that police are altering their definition of the type of incident which attract an "aggravated" charge. For example, the decision making process now being proposed is, in fact, a two-stage one in which the police firstly exclude (say) domestic violence as a possible contender for an aggravated charge, but still apply that charge to a constant proportion of reported assaults overall. If the numbers of reported domestic assaults then rise, the police must charge an increasing number of the remaining assaults as "aggravated", in order to maintain a stable proportion of such charges overall.³ This deduction cannot, however, be tested until data is available on the nature of assaults in general. Again, whether or not increases in the "offences against the person" reports can be accounted for by increased reporting to police, rather than increased incidence of the alleged offences in question, is beyond the scope of the present report, and must be left to further research. It is worth pointing out, however, that if the above theory were true and domestic assaults, or at least assaults in which the alleged assailant is frequently known, are excluded from consideration as aggravated assaults, this might account for the changes in the clear-up rates of aggravated assault and offences against the person overall (see Figure 2). If offences with potentially very high clear-up rates are increasing, but are being excluded from the aggravated assault figures, then a decrease in clear-up rates for aggravated assault, together with a consequent increase in the clear-up rates for other "offences against the person" might be reasonably expected.⁴ This is, in fact, the general pattern shown in Figure 2. As noted, however, these speculations require further analysis before they can be confirmed, or refuted, with confidence, though it would appear that the increase in serious assault is not simply due to the increased reporting of more serious assaults.

³Note that this theory could be based on any assault type which is not highly represented in the present results. This includes gang disputes or "horseplay" etc, as well as "domestic" assaults. The "excluded" category could, of course, be comprised of a combination of these categories.

⁴The proportion of OAP charged as "aggravated" assault is a reasonable predictor of the clear-up rate of all other OAP ($F= 5.90$, $p < 0.05$, significant). This might be interpreted to mean that there is a movement of incidents with high clear-up potential across the boundary from aggravated to "other" charge types.

The nature of the incidents and police decision on charging

It should not be assumed from the "constant proportions" theory (above), that police necessarily have a conscious policy to fix the proportion of offences charged as "aggravated". Nor, for that matter, need there be such a policy in regard to the "exclusion" of certain types of assault from consideration as "aggravated".

Given that the majority of unreported assaults are considered "trivial" by the victims (ABS, 1985), and that a charge of assault occasioning actual bodily harm (ABH) can be laid if any actual harm is done to the victim (see above), there is likely to only a narrow range of injury seriousness between reporting and potential ABH charge. That only a minority of reports are actually charged with ABH, suggests police may make the decision on grounds other than "seriousness of injury" alone.

If a number of factors operate in an interlocking fashion to "govern" the proportion of reports judged as "aggravated", the charging process would function like a complex physical system, such as a thermostatically controlled air conditioned room, in dynamic equilibrium. Each system would vary above and below some set level of performance (sometimes called "hunting" the set level). In the case of the air conditioned room, its air temperature would rise slightly above the level set by the thermostat whenever any heat source affected the room, but this increase would then be corrected by the thermostat switching on the refrigeration. If the temperature fell below the set level, the thermostat would then switch on the heating, and so on. *Mutatis mutandis*, a similar process may apply in the decision to charge any given assault as "serious". If the proportion judged "serious" rises too far above some set level it will be subsequently reduced by some (possibly very complex) governing mechanism. If it falls below the set level, the same mechanism may function to increase the proportion back toward the set level. The proportion of assaults judged "serious" would then be "hunting" the set level of offence definition as the factors influencing the judgement varied randomly over time. That is, the proportion of reports judged as "aggravated" should vary in a roughly sinusoidal fashion about a constant value. The proportions shown in Figure 7 might be thus interpreted, being seen as about one cycle of this sinusoid, with a period of roughly 16-18 years. Much more data would be required, however, before this pattern could be reliably established.

If the assumption that a constellation of factors (other than simply injury seriousness) determine the proportion of reports judged "aggravated", then it is easy to see how a range of alleged offences may be excluded from the decision making in the first place, since the incidents may fail to fit a whole range of criteria for inclusion. Thus, a given report may not necessarily be excluded because of say, "domestic assault", but because of one or more of a number of reasons which it may have in common with other types of assault.

On the other hand, if it is assumed that injury seriousness is the main criterion used for the decision to charge as an "aggravated" assault (and this is, after all, the criterion indicated in the legal definition of the various types of assault), then the data in Figure 7 is more difficult to explain.

This data could be consistent with the possibility that a constant proportion of all incidents involve injuries of a given level of seriousness. For this to be a plausible interpretation, however, would require that there was a clear criterion of the level of injury seriousness which police used in their judgement of which charge to lay. But it has already been argued that the range of injury seriousness between making the incident "serious" enough to report and serious enough to warrant a "serious assault" charge is very narrow, perhaps non-existent. If so, a clear criterion based on the nature of the injury itself is unlikely and, if present, is even more unlikely to be the criterion specified on the legislation e.g. broken skin, actual harm, etc. since these are likely to occur in any reported assault and thus do not distinguish "serious" and other assaults. As it stands, a criterion based on injury seriousness alone could, unless more clearly specified than is presently the case, leave a large "grey area" of doubtful cases which could be assigned either charge type. This point, however, will not be clarified until a further study is conducted on common assaults, and the actual practice of police in this situation. Such information will be presented in a second Bureau report on assault, currently being planned.

Again, the notion of a constant proportion of injuries of a given seriousness over time suggests that the increases in that period are the results of increased occurrence of offences, rather than merely increased reporting. This is because an increase in reporting, coupled with a constant definition based on injury seriousness, is likely to bring a greater number of less serious (more "trivial") incidents to the attention of police, and thus reduce the proportion of assaults meeting the given criterion of injury seriousness. While there is some evidence of reduced seriousness in injuries sustained in recent years (see Table 2), the point is that the charges laid remained constant even if this change in injury seriousness had occurred.

On balance, it would appear that police do not use a single criterion, based on injury seriousness, to decide whether or not an incident will be charged as an "aggravated" assault. Rather, it seems that a range of interlocking factors combine to produce a relatively constant proportion of all offences against the person being judged as aggravated assaults, in addition, or even independently from, the nature of any injuries involved in those alleged assaults. Further research would be required to decide this issue more firmly, and to identify those factors actually involved in the charging decision, if this proves to be appropriate. It should be noted, however, that these factors have produced a stable "definition" of serious assault

over a considerable period of time, and across substantial changes in police personnel and procedures. Given this, the factors of interest may turn out to be extremely general attributes of operational policing or, perhaps, general psychological characteristics of the police asked to make the difficult decision on how to charge in a given incident of assault.

5. OVERALL SUMMARY

- * Reports of aggravated assaults have risen steadily since 1971, and have increased from 1,686 reports in 1982/83 to 3,677 reports in 1986/87, a percentage increase of 118 per cent, or 23.6 per cent per annum, on average since 1982/83. There are similar increases in the number of reports for all offences against the person.
- * Alleged offences occurred most commonly on Fridays and Saturdays, and between 10pm and 2am. Victims were allegedly attacked in their own homes, in the street (often in and around hotels), or in the hotels themselves (a total of 73.9 per cent of all incidents occurred in these locations).
- * Most attacks (62.8%) did not involve weapons, and the use of weapons declined between 1982 and 1986/87. Where weapons were used, they were usually ones of convenience, rarely knives or guns.
- * Nearly half (48.3%) of incidents arose out of miscellaneous altercations, with a further 20.6 per cent being domestic assaults of any kind. The increase in aggravated assault reports was not confined to any particular type of incident. Robbery was involved in only 3.4 per cent of cases, and sexual assault in only 1.6 per cent.
- * Most incidents (67.7%) occurred between males. At least 90 per cent of suspects, and 75 per cent of victims were males. The most common age group of both victims (31.5%) and suspects (36.4%) was 20-29 years.
- * Increases in aggravated assault reports are not accounted for by increasing population, nor by increasing numbers in the "offence prone" age groups.
- * Nor can the increase in reports be explained by hypothesised increases in domestic violence alone. 45.3 per cent of victims were not well known to suspects, and only 13 per cent were spouses, lovers, or de factos.
- * The increases are also not explainable by any increase in gang disputes, nor muggings, which account for very few of the serious assault reports (8 per cent and 3.4 per cent, respectively).

- * Increases in reported incidents do not appear to be due simply to increased reporting to police, but imply (at least in part) an actual increase in alleged offending. This point requires research, however, in order to be conclusively established.

- * Police appear to charge a fairly stable proportion of all alleged offences against the person as aggravated assault, irrespective of the number of OAP reports, or the nature of the injuries sustained by victims

REFERENCES

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- N.S.W. Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (1987a). Crime and Justice Bulletin No. 1, Trends in Serious Crime, June, 1987.
- N.S.W. Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (1987b). Robbery, December 1987.
- Watson, R. and Purnell, H. (1986). Criminal Law in New South Wales, Vol. 1. Release 12.

APPENDIX A

POLICE INCIDENT REPORT N.S.W. POLICE DEPARTMENT				1. Microfilm Reference No.							
2. Submitting Station		3. Patrol where occurred		4. Allocating Station		5. Station Index No. Year Number					
IF THIS IS AN ORIGINAL REPORT - GO TO BOX 14 IF THIS IS FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUE AT BOX 6				6. Original Allocating Station		7. Original Index No. Year Number					
8. Victim Name - As originally reported				9. Victim altered (Indicate Altered <input type="checkbox"/> or Additional <input type="checkbox"/> To: _____ Phone _____							
10. Res. Address & Postcode Phone _____				11. Bus. Address & Postcode Phone _____							
12. Type of incident as originally reported				13. Type of incident altered to:							
14. VICTIM/OWNER/OCCUPIER/FINDER (Business name if Business)				15. TYPE OF INCIDENT							
16. Res. Address & Postcode Phone _____				17. Bus. Address & Postcode Phone _____							
18. Victim's Occupation, Age/D.O.B. (Assault/Sex. Assault matters only)				19. Nature of injury/condition - name of Hospital if admitted							
20. Time, Day, Date of Incident				21. Exact Address of incident location (include Postcode)							
22. Reported by Res. Phone _____				23. Address Bus. Phone _____							
24. Time, Date Reported				25. W.M. No. & Date							
26. Witnesses Res. Phone _____				27. Addresses Bus. Phone _____							
28. MODUS OPERANDI - Describe type of premises or area where occurred											
29. Point of entry Rear <input type="checkbox"/> Side <input type="checkbox"/> Front <input type="checkbox"/>		30. Gate/Door <input type="checkbox"/> Window <input type="checkbox"/> Ceiling/Roof <input type="checkbox"/> Floor <input type="checkbox"/> Wall <input type="checkbox"/>		31. Balcony <input type="checkbox"/>		32. Ground Floor <input type="checkbox"/> First Floor <input type="checkbox"/> Above <input type="checkbox"/>					
33. Describe Weapon, Instrument, Trick or Device used & METHOD OF ENTRY											
34. By whom committed or character assumed, CONVERSATION USED or UNUSUAL ACTS at scene											
35. Vehicle used State of Reg'n		36. Reg'd No.		37. Year		38. Make/Model		39. Type		40. Colours	
41. Stolen m/v <input type="checkbox"/> Recovered m/v <input type="checkbox"/> Suspect m/v <input type="checkbox"/> m/v not stolen <input type="checkbox"/> m/v subject of offence <input type="checkbox"/> Not known <input type="checkbox"/>											
42. FOUND PROPERTY ONLY		43. Entered in M.P.B. at (Station)		44. Item No.		45. If Money \$ _____		46. Misc. Receipt No. _____		47. Does finder wish to claim property? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
48. NARRATIVE: LIST IDENTIFIABLE ITEMS OF PROPERTY FIRST. Include additional information about incident, witnesses, etc. Add VEHICLE WARNINGS or additional descriptions. Describe how property was lost or found.								MODEL No.		SERIAL No.	
49. Property Value \$ _____		50. Property Recovered Value No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Part <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____		51. Any property identifiable No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Prob. <input type="checkbox"/>		52. Is this incident Accepted <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected <input type="checkbox"/> Doubtful <input type="checkbox"/>		53. Attachments No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>			
54. Police in charge				55. Duty Type		56. Station		57. Is this incident Drug Related <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol Related <input type="checkbox"/>			
58. Signature		59. Name and Rank		60. Duty Type		61. Checked by (Signature & Rank)					
		62. Station		63. Date							

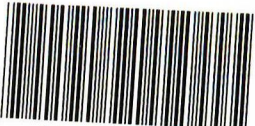
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POLICE INCIDENT & ARREST REPORT N.S.W. POLICE DEPARTMENT <small>(FOR USE ONLY WHEN FINGERPRINTED) P.42</small>				1. Microfilm Reference No.	
2. Submitting Station		3. Patrol where occurred		4. Allocating Station	
				5. Station Index No. Year Number	
6. VICTIM				7. TYPE OF INCIDENT	
8. Res. Address and Postcode			9. Bus. Address and Postcode		
Phone			Phone		
10. Victim's Occupation, Age/D.O.B. (Assault/Sex. Assault matters only)				11. Nature of injury/condition - name of Hospital if admitted	
12. Time and Date of Offence				13. Exact incident location - address (include Postcode)	
14. Reported by			15. Address		16. Bus. Phone
Res. Phone					
18. Time and Date Reported				17. Time and Date Arrested	
18. Witness			19. Address		20. Bus. Phone
Res. Phone					
20. MODUS OPERANDI - Describe type of premises or area where occurred					
21. Point of entry		22. Gate/Door		23. Balcony	
Rear <input type="checkbox"/> Side <input type="checkbox"/> Front <input type="checkbox"/>		Window <input type="checkbox"/> Ceiling/Roof <input type="checkbox"/> Floor <input type="checkbox"/> Wall <input type="checkbox"/>		Ground Floor <input type="checkbox"/> First Floor <input type="checkbox"/> Above <input type="checkbox"/>	
25. Describe Weapon, Instrument, Trick or Device used and METHOD OF ENTRY					
26. By whom committed or character assumed. CONVERSATION USED or UNUSUAL ACTS at scene					
27. OFFENDER ARRESTED - 1			28. Alias or Nickname		29. Office Use Only
30. Res. Address			31. Place of Birth		32. Sex
Phone					33. D.O.B.
34. Places/premises frequented (not localities) - be specific			35. Associates (not co-offenders)		
36. Peculiarities - Permanent visible identifying characteristics					
37. OFFENDER ARRESTED - 2			38. Alias or Nickname		39. Office Use Only
40. Res. Address			41. Place of Birth		42. Sex
Phone					43. D.O.B.
44. Places/premises frequented (not localities) - be specific			45. Associates (not co-offenders)		
46. Peculiarities - Permanent visible identifying characteristics					
47. Vehicle used		48. Reg'd No.	49. Year	50. Make/Model	
State of Reg'n				51. Type	
52. Colours		53. Stolen m/v <input type="checkbox"/> Recovered m/v <input type="checkbox"/> Suspect m/v <input type="checkbox"/> m/v not stolen <input type="checkbox"/> m/v subject of offence <input type="checkbox"/> Not known <input type="checkbox"/>			
54. NARRATIVE (NOT TO INCLUDE INFORMATION COVERED ABOVE)					
56. Property Value			58. Duty Type		57. Station
59. Property Recovered					
No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Part <input type="checkbox"/> \$			60. Is this incident		61. Attachments
			Drug Related <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol Related <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
62. Signature		63. Name and rank		64. Duty Type	
		66. Station		67. Date	
				65. Checked by (Signature and rank)	

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