

Introduction

This chapter contains information relating to the Victorian criminal justice system. The criminal justice system consists of the State and Commonwealth institutions, agencies, departments and personnel responsible for dealing with the justice aspects of crime, victims of crime, persons accused or convicted of committing a crime, and other related issues and processes. Private companies are also involved with the provision of correctional services.

In Victoria, two systems of criminal justice exist: the Federal criminal justice system, based on offences against Commonwealth laws; and the State system, based on offences against Victorian laws. It is the statute and common law of the State that primarily governs the day-to-day lives of most Victorians.

The data in this chapter are sourced from the national Crime and Safety Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and from administrative by-product collections covering crimes recorded by police, case flow information for criminal courts and information on prisoners dealt with by the corrections agencies. Data are also presented from reports compiled by the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence and the Legal Aid Commission of Victoria.

Crime and safety

The Crime and Safety Survey was last conducted nationally in April 1998 by the ABS, and obtained information on the level of victimisation in the community for selected offences. Information was collected from individuals, and from households, about their experience of selected crimes, whether these crimes were reported to police, and crime related risk factors. The characteristics of these offences refer to the most recent incident experienced by the victim. The next Crime and Safety Survey will be conducted nationally in April 2002.

Crime reported to the police

Many factors influence whether or not a crime is reported to police. Rates of reporting to the police vary depending on the type of offence. Over 97% of households that were a victim of motor vehicle theft reported the most recent theft (table 10.1). This compares with less than half (45.8%) of the victims of robbery and almost one in four victims of assault reporting the most recent incident to the police.

Common reasons for not reporting the most recent incident to police were that it was felt that there was nothing the police could do, or that the victim considered the incident was too trivial.

10.1 REPORTING RATES TO POLICE FOR THE MOST RECENT INCIDENT — 12 months prior to April 1998

	Told police	Did not tell police	Total victims	Reporting rates(a)
	'000	'000	'000	%
Break-in(b)	51.3	10.4	61.7	83.1
Attempted break-in(b)	13.7	22.6	36.3	37.7
Motor vehicle theft(b)	26.5	**0.8	27.3	97.1
Robbery(c)	4.4	5.2	9.6	45.8
Assault(c)	32.5	107.4	139.9	23.2
Sexual assault(d)	*2.5	9.2	11.6	*21.5

(a) The number of victims who told police about the most recent incident as a percentage of the total number of victims for each offence. (b) Households. (c) Persons aged 15 years and over. (d) Females aged 18 years and over.

Source: *Crime and Safety, Australia* (Cat. no. 4509.0).

Victims of crime

In the 12 months prior to the 1998 Crime and Safety Survey, there were an estimated 61,700 households in Victoria which had at least one break-in to their home, garage or shed, and a further 36,300 households where signs of an attempted break-in were found (table 10.2). Victoria's victimisation rate for these offences was well below the national rate. About 27,300 households experienced at least one motor vehicle theft in the 12 months prior to the survey.

An estimated 139,900 persons aged 15 years and over were victims of assault in the 12 months prior to the survey and 9,600 persons aged 15 years and over were victims of robbery. For females aged 18 years and over, about 11,600 were victims of sexual assault during the same period. Sexual assault was one offence where the victimisation rate was higher for Victoria than the national rate.

10.2 VICTIMS OF CRIME — 12 months prior to April 1998

	Victims	Relevant populations	Victimisation prevalence rates	
			Victoria	Australia
			%	%
Break-in(a)	61.7	1 734.1	3.6	5.0
Attempted break-in(a)	36.3	1 734.1	2.1	3.2
Motor vehicle theft(a)	27.3	1 734.1	1.6	1.7
Robbery(b)	9.6	3 635.7	0.3	0.5
Assault(b)	139.9	3 635.7	3.8	4.3
Sexual assault(c)	11.6	1 755.3	0.7	0.4

(a) Households. (b) Persons aged 15 years and over. (c) Females aged 18 years and over.

Source: *Crime and Safety, Australia* (Cat. no. 4509.0).

Recorded crime

Crimes recorded by police relate to offences that are known to, and are recorded by, police. These offences may have been reported by a victim, a witness or other person, or may have been detected by police. The statistics do not provide a total picture of crime as not all crime comes to the attention of police. Also, the statistics provided in this section are from the ABS National Crime Statistics collection which draws its data from the police. The ABS collection only reports against a selected range of offence types rather than the total crime data that has been recorded by police. Care should be taken in interpreting these crime statistics as fluctuations in recorded crime may be a reflection of changes in community attitudes to reporting crime, changes in police procedures or changes in crime reporting and recording systems, rather than a change in the actual incidence of specific criminal behaviour.

Overall, the number of victims of crime recorded by police in Victoria decreased between 1999 and 2000 for crimes against the person, but increased for crimes against property. Property crimes make up the greatest proportion of crimes recorded by police (in total, 92.0% of the victims of the offences listed in table 10.3). These include the offences of unlawful entry with intent, motor vehicle theft and other theft. In Victoria during 2000, police recorded 78,774 victims of unlawful entry with intent, 36,591 victims of motor vehicle theft and 141,219 victims of 'other' theft.

In terms of crime against the person, the most commonly recorded offence was assault, with 16,541 cases recorded by police in 2000. More than half (53.7%) of all victims of robbery were victims of armed robbery.

10.3 VICTIMS(a) OF CRIME RECORDED BY POLICE

	Victoria			Australia	
	1999 rate(b)	2000 rate(b)	2000 no.	2000 rate(b)	2000 no.
Homicide and related offences					
Murder	1.3	1.2	55	1.6	302
Attempted murder	1.2	1.1	51	2.0	391
Manslaughter	0.1	0.3	12	0.2	44
Driving causing death	1.0	1.1	51	1.3	252
Assault	363.7	347.1	16 541	736.8	141 124
Sexual assault	59.5	51.9	2 474	81.6	15 630
Kidnapping/abduction	2.6	2.2	106	3.6	688
Robbery					
Armed robbery	40.0	37.5	1 785	49.5	9 474
Unarmed robbery	32.4	32.3	1 541	72.3	13 840
Blackmail/extortion	1.6	1.4	69	1.3	254
Unlawful entry with intent	1 620.9	1 652.9	78 774	2 280.8	436 865
Motor vehicle theft	677.1	767.8	36 591	726.2	139 094
Other theft	2 875.8	2 963.1	141 219	3 523.1	674 813

(a) The type of victim depends on the type of crime committed. Victims can be persons (homicide, assault, kidnapping/abduction, other theft); properties (unlawful entry with intent); motor vehicles (motor vehicle theft); or both persons or organisations (robbery, blackmail/extortion). (b) Reported incidents per 100,000 population.

Source: *Recorded Crime, Australia (Cat. no. 4510.0)*.

Victims of crime recorded by the police were mostly in the younger age groups (table 10.4). Almost two-thirds of all victims of the offences listed in table 10.4 were aged less than 35 years, compared to 1.9% of victims being aged 65 years and over.

In 2000, 63.5% of all assault victims were male. The highest number of assaults against both males and females was for those aged 15–24 years. Females represented 84.4% of victims of sexual assault and 81.0% of these female victims were aged under 35 years.

10.4 VICTIMS OF CRIME RECORDED BY POLICE(a), By Sex and Age Group of Victim — 2000

	Age group (years)								Total no.
	0–14 no.	15–24 no.	25–34 no.	35–44 no.	45–54 no.	55–64 no.	65 and over no.	Not stated no.	
MALES									
Homicide									
Murder	—	4	9	9	5	5	4	—	36
Attempted murder	4	6	9	6	6	—	2	2	35
Manslaughter	2	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	5
Driving causing death	—	13	9	4	3	2	—	—	31
Assault	735	3 097	2 985	1 671	917	310	134	660	10 509
Sexual assault	110	86	72	54	15	3	1	12	353
Kidnapping/abduction	12	13	4	2	1	—	—	—	32
Robbery	108	743	343	208	113	55	35	40	1 645
Blackmail/extortion	—	8	9	13	6	4	1	2	43
FEMALES									
Homicide									
Murder	1	1	5	4	2	1	4	1	19
Attempted murder	4	1	2	5	2	1	—	—	15
Manslaughter	—	1	1	1	1	—	3	—	7
Driving causing death	2	6	3	2	2	1	2	1	19
Assault	460	1 612	1 560	915	422	133	71	261	5 434
Sexual assault	436	823	433	229	76	14	24	55	2 090
Kidnapping/abduction	33	22	12	4	2	—	—	1	74
Robbery	25	276	210	147	131	77	135	38	1 039
Blackmail/extortion	—	4	4	3	2	1	—	—	14
PERSONS									
Homicide									
Murder	1	5	14	13	7	6	8	1	55
Attempted murder	8	7	11	11	8	1	2	3	51
Manslaughter	2	1	2	2	1	1	3	—	12
Driving causing death	2	19	12	6	5	3	2	2	51
Assault(b)	1 211	4 757	4 589	2 614	1 352	452	206	1 360	16 541
Sexual assault(b)	550	916	510	284	93	17	25	79	2 474
Kidnapping/abduction	45	35	16	6	3	—	—	1	106
Robbery(b)	139	1 034	562	363	250	136	172	103	2 759
Blackmail/extortion	—	12	13	16	8	5	1	3	58

(a) For offences (e.g. robbery and blackmail/extortion) where the victim may be a person or organisation, only person victims are included. (b) Includes those victims for whom sex was not stated.

Source: ABS data available on request, National Crime Statistics Collection.

The relationship of the offender to the victim is known in about one in five (19.4%) of recorded crimes (table 10.5). For the offences of murder, attempted murder, sexual assault and blackmail/extortion, offenders were much more likely to be known by the victim. Care should be taken when examining the ‘relationship of offender to victim’ statistics as for more than half of some categories of recorded crime the relationship is not stated.

10.5 VICTIMS OF CRIME RECORDED BY POLICE(a), By Relationship of Offender to Victim — 2000

	Murder	Attempted murder	Manslaughter	Driving causing death	Assault	Sexual Assault	Kidnapping/abduction	Blackmail/extortion
	no.	no.	no.	no.	no.	no.	no.	no.
Known to victim								
Family member	13	16	3	3	918	375	—	4
Non-family member	20	21	2	16	1 550	767	23	20
Total	33	37	5	19	2 468	1 142	23	24
Unknown to victim	21	14	7	32	3 647	525	65	17
Not stated	1	—	—	—	10 426	807	18	17
Total	55	51	12	51	16 541	2 474	106	58

(a) Refers to person victims only. For offences (e.g. armed robbery, unarmed robbery and blackmail/extortion) where the victim may be a person or organisation, only person victims are included.

Source: ABS data available on request, National Crime Statistics Collection.

During 2000, a weapon was used in the majority (69.1%) of murders and attempted murders (70.6%) that were committed in Victoria (table 10.6). However, firearms were less likely to be used than other weapons for these offences. In almost all (97.8%) incidents of sexual assault recorded, no weapon was used.

10.6 VICTIMS OF CRIME RECORDED BY POLICE, By Weapon Use — 2000

	Weapons used				No weapons used
	Firearm	Other weapon	Weapon n.f.d.	Total	
	%	%	%	%	
Homicide					
Murder	25.5	43.6	—	69.1	30.9
Attempted murder	21.6	49.0	—	70.6	29.4
Manslaughter	—	33.3	—	33.3	66.7
Assault	0.8	12.7	—	13.5	86.5
Sexual assault	0.3	1.9	—	2.2	97.8
Kidnapping/abduction	3.8	7.5	—	11.3	88.7
Robbery(a)	6.6	42.6	4.5	53.7	46.3

(a) Victims of robbery refers to individual persons or organisations. All other offence categories used in this table refer to individual persons.

Source: ABS data available on request, National Crime Statistics Collection.

Illicit drug offences

In general, the traffic in and abuse of illicit drugs results in significant cost to individuals and the community. In Victoria during the financial year 1999–2000, a total of 16,985 arrests for illicit drug-related offences were made (table 10.7) representing about one-fifth of all drug arrests in Australia. Cannabis (43.7%) remains the most prevalent category of drug for which arrests were made. However, while there was a decrease in the number of drug arrests for cannabis, cocaine and heroin between 1998–99 and 1999–2000, the number of arrests for other/unknown drugs more than doubled over this period.

10.7 DRUG ARRESTS(a)

Type of drug	1997–98		1998–99		1999–2000	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Cannabis	9 034	55.8	9 286	47.9	7 419	43.7
Cocaine	32	0.2	70	0.4	43	0.3
Heroin and other opioids	5 544	34.3	8 153	42.0	5 952	35.0
Amphetamine-type substances	744	4.6	1 028	5.3	1 140	6.7
Other drugs	821	5.1	855	4.4	2 431	14.3
Total	16 175	100.0	19 392	100.0	16 985	100.0

(a) Includes consumers and providers.

Source: Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, *Australian Illicit Drug Report*.

There are a number of ways in which the amount of drugs seized are measured — these include weight, volume, linear measurement or as a unit count, such as the number of tablets, plants or bags. Similarly, the method of estimating the amount of drugs seized varies between States and within jurisdictions. Therefore, the data in table 10.8 include those seizures for which a drug weight was recorded. This means that it does not reflect the total number of seizures, nor the amount of drug seized for all drug types. In 1999–2000, seizures of cannabis accounted for 71.9% of all seizures recorded in table 10.8.

10.8 SEIZURES, By Drug Type — 1999–2000(a)

Type of drug	Seizures		Weight
	no.		grams
Amphetamine-type substances	296		118 905
Heroin	742		22 801
Other opioids	4		84
Cocaine	28		8 425
Cannabis	2 867		921 206
Steroids	1		2 109
Hallucinogens	11		2 300
Other and unknown drugs	39		40 653

(a) Includes only those seizures for which a drug weight was recorded. There is at present no way to adjust for double counting of some seizures resulting from joint operations between the Australian Federal Police and State and Territory Police Services.

Source: Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, *Australian Illicit Drug Report*.

Court system

The States and Territories have powers to enact their own criminal law. The Commonwealth has similar powers to enact laws, including sanctions for criminal offences in relation to its constitutional responsibilities. In effect, there are nine different systems of criminal law in existence in Australia.

In Victoria cases involving less serious offences are heard by the Magistrates' Court. The County Court hears more serious criminal and civil cases involving larger claims and cases on appeal from the Magistrates' Court. The Supreme Court of Victoria hears the most serious criminal and civil cases, as well as appeals from the County and Magistrates' Courts. A Federal Family Court of Australia hears cases under the *Family Law Act*. The High Court of Australia acts as the final court of appeal for all criminal, civil and family law matters from courts in Australia.

Higher criminal courts

The Supreme and County Courts in Victoria are also known as the higher courts, and statistics for these courts are presented below.

At the start of 1999–2000, there were 1,406 defendants involved in cases before these courts which were still being processed (i.e. pending at the start), and a further 2,235 defendants who had cases initiated during the year (table 10.9). This represents a total caseload of 3,641 defendants before the higher courts in 1999–2000. More than half (60.7%) had all their charges finalised during that year while the remaining defendants (1,432) had at least one charge not finalised at the end of the financial year.

10.9 DEFENDANTS INITIATED(a) — 1999–2000

Status	Supreme court	County court	Total higher courts
	no.	no.	no.
Active workload during year			
Pending at start	77	1 329	1 406
Initiated	113	2 122	2 235
Status at year's end			
Finalised	103	2 106	2 209
Pending at end	87	1 345	1 432

(a) Data exclude defendants in appeal cases.

Source: *Higher Criminal Courts, Australia (Cat. no. 4513.0)*.

During 1999–2000, almost all (95.6%) of the 2,209 defendants finalised by the higher criminal courts were finalised as a result of their charges being adjudicated, i.e. guilty plea, guilty verdict, or acquittal (table 10.10). Of the 2,111 adjudicated defendants, 1,900 (90.0%) were proven guilty. Of these, the majority had pleaded guilty, with only 10.5% going through to trial where a guilty verdict was returned.

10.10 DEFENDANTS FINALISED(a) — 1999–2000

Method of finalisation	Supreme court	County court	Total higher courts
	no.	no.	no.
Adjudicated			
Acquitted	13	198	211
Proven guilty			
Guilty verdict	36	163	199
Guilty plea	48	1 653	1 701
Total proven guilty	84	1 816	1 900
<i>Total adjudicated</i>	97	2 014	2 111
Non-adjudicated			
Bench warrant issued	—	11	11
Withdrawn	6	78	84
Other finalisation(b)	—	3	3
<i>Total non-adjudicated</i>	6	92	98
Total defendants finalised	103	2 106	2 209

(a) Data exclude defendants finalised in appeal cases. (b) Includes defendants who were withdrawn by the prosecution, transferred to another court level or finalised by another non-adjudicated method.

Source: *Higher Criminal Courts, Australia (Cat. no. 4513.0)*.

During 1999–2000, the median duration from initiation to finalisation of proceedings for defendants in the higher criminal courts was 23.4 weeks, a slight increase on the 1998–99 figure of 23.3 weeks (table 10.11). Those with a guilty verdict took considerably longer to finalise (52.1 weeks).

10.11 MEDIAN DURATION FOR DEFENDANTS(a) — 1999–2000

Method of finalisation	Supreme court	County court	Total higher courts
	weeks	weeks	weeks
Acquitted	36.9	42.9	42.4
Guilty verdict	40.0	54.1	52.1
Guilty plea	26.6	18.3	18.6
Other finalisation(b)	89.9	32.7	32.9
All defendants finalised	34.6	22.6	23.4

(a) Data exclude defendants finalised in appeal cases. (b) Includes defendants who were withdrawn by the prosecution, transferred to another court level or finalised by another non-adjudicated method.

Source: *Higher Criminal Courts, Australia (Cat. no. 4513.0)*; ABS data available on request, *Criminal Courts*.

Legal aid

Victoria Legal Aid is an independent statutory authority established by the *Legal Aid Act (1978)*. It replaced the Legal Aid Commission of Victoria in 1995. Funding is received from the Commonwealth and State Governments to provide legal services to the Victorian community. While many of the services provided are free of charge, financial assistance may only be provided to persons who would otherwise be unable to afford the cost of a private practitioner. A means test is applied to determine suitability for legal aid.

In 2000–01, there were a total of 42,148 applications received by Victoria Legal Aid, an increase of 6.1% on the number received in 1999–2000 (table 10.12). A total of 86.3% of applications received were approved, the highest approval rate in the period 1995–96 to 2000–01.

10.12 LEGAL AID APPLICATIONS AND THEIR OUTCOMES(a)

	Total applications received	Total assessed	Approved no.	Refused no.	Approval rate(b) %
1995–96	47 759	46 453	38 361	8 092	82.6
1996–97	39 940	39 586	32 279	7 307	81.5
1997–98	41 245	40 778	33 934	6 845	82.7
1998–99	41 114	40 706	34 743	5 603	84.6
1999–2000	39 711	39 765	33 444	5 322	84.1
2000–01	42 148	42 113	36 345	4 437	86.3

(a) Figures relate to applications either received, assessed, approved and/or refused in the reference period, and therefore do not necessarily equate to each other. (b) Approved applications as a percentage of assessed applications, but does not take into account pending or withdrawn applications.

Source: *Victoria Legal Aid, Sixth Statutory Annual Report*.

Corrective services

Corrective services are responsible for administering the penalties and orders handed down by the criminal courts, which require some form of supervision or custody of the offender, including responsibility for persons given orders pending judgement or sentencing (i.e. unsentenced prisoners).

All the States and Territories operate prisons and/or other types of corrective services. The Commonwealth does not operate any prisons, and federal offenders are supervised by State agencies. In Victoria, a number of privately operated (commercial business ventures) prison facilities have been established. These prisons operate in conjunction with State operated prisons and are monitored by the Corrective Service authority. Public prisons are operated by CORE – the Public Correctional Enterprise. Currently, these prisons include Arrarat, Barwon, Beechworth, Bendigo, Dhurringile, Langi Kal Kal, Loddon, Melbourne Assessment, Tarrengower and Won Wron. CORE also manages all Community Correctional Services in Victoria.

Prisoner population

There were 3,153 prisoners in Victorian prisons on 30 June 2000, of which 94.2% were male (table 10.13). The average age of prisoners was 34.6 years for males and 32.5 years for females. From 1995 to 2000, while the net Victorian prisoner population increased by 27.8%, the distribution of sentenced to unsentenced prisoners has remained relatively constant during this period.

10.13 PRISON POPULATION

30 June	Sentenced			Unsentenced			Prisoners		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
1995	2 022	96	2 118	329	20	349	2 351	116	2 467
1996	1 958	100	2 058	355	27	382	2 313	127	2 440
1997	2 103	123	2 226	387	30	417	2 490	153	2 643
1998	2 303	119	2 422	402	34	436	2 705	153	2 858
1999	2 362	144	2 506	382	35	417	2 744	179	2 923
2000	2 573	144	2 717	397	39	436	2 970	183	3 153

Source: *Prisoners in Australia* (Cat. no. 4517.0); ABS data available on request, *Prisoners in Australia*.

Table 10.14 shows that of all sentenced prisoners, nearly half were convicted of offences involving violence or the threat of violence such as sex offences, murder and homicide and robbery. Males were more likely to be convicted for sex offences (14.0%) and break and enter (13.0%), whereas females were more likely to be convicted for robbery (18.1%) and other theft (15.3%).

10.14 SENTENCED PRISONERS, By Most Serious Offence(a) — 2000

	Males		Females		Persons	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Homicide						
Murder	220	8.6	11	7.6	231	8.5
Other homicide	82	3.2	5	3.5	87	3.2
Assault	148	5.8	8	5.6	156	5.7
Sex offences	361	14.0	—	—	361	13.3
Other offences against the person	32	1.2	1	0.7	33	1.2
Robbery	289	11.2	26	18.1	315	11.6
Extortion	1	—	—	—	1	—
Break and enter	335	13.0	16	11.1	351	12.9
Fraud and misappropriation	83	3.2	11	7.6	94	3.5
Receiving	28	1.1	—	—	28	1.0
Other theft	227	8.8	22	15.3	249	9.2
Property damage(b)	27	1.0	1	0.7	28	1.0
Government security(c)	265	10.3	15	10.4	280	10.3
Other offences against good order	20	0.8	1	0.7	21	0.8
Possession/use drugs	19	0.7	—	—	19	0.7
Deal/traffic drugs	241	9.4	18	12.5	259	9.5
Manufacture/grow drugs	15	0.6	2	1.4	17	0.6
Driving offences	15	0.6	1	0.7	16	0.6
Licence/registration offences	64	2.5	1	0.7	65	2.4
Other traffic offences	4	0.2	—	—	4	0.1
Other offences	97	3.8	5	3.5	102	3.9
Total	2 573	100.0	144	100.0	2 717	100.0

(a) The most serious offence is the offence for which the prisoner has received the longest sentence. Where sentences are equal, or the longest sentence cannot be determined, the most serious offence is the offence with the lowest Australian National Classification of Offences code. (b) Property damage also includes environmental offences. (c) Government security also includes justice procedures.

Source: ABS data available on request, *Prisoners in Australia*.

Private prisons

Historically, all prisons in Victoria were government owned and operated. However, during the 1990s the prison system underwent significant change. The introduction of the Corrections (Management) Bill in 1993, and the subsequent Corrections (Amendment) Bill in 1994, paved the way for private sector involvement in the prison system.

Since 1996, three prisons owned and operated by the private sector have opened in Victoria, replacing existing prisons which were considered to be ageing and of limited capacity. The new private prisons opened during 1996 and 1997 were the Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre at Deer Park; Fulham Correctional Centre, located near Sale; and the Port Phillip Correctional Centre at Laverton North. Five public prisons were subsequently closed: Fairlea, Morwell River, Sale, Metropolitan Reception and Pentridge. The Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre has subsequently returned to the public system, and is now called the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

During 1999–2000, 45% of the prisoner population was accommodated in private prisons, with the remainder located in prisons directly managed through the public prison system. Since the introduction of private prisons, Victoria now has more prison accommodation in non-metropolitan areas than in the metropolitan area. Of the privately operated prisons, Port Phillip Correctional Centre has the largest prisoner population with 646 prisoners.

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