



New Zealand
Crime and Victims **survey**

HELP CREATE SAFER COMMUNITIES

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on crime and victimisation

Descriptive statistics

June 2023

Results drawn from Cycles 1 to 5
(2018–22) of the New Zealand Crime
and Victims Survey

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Executive summary

The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the associated government responses, marked a period of significant societal change in New Zealand and the world. Since the pandemic began, numerous reports and articles have been written about how crime has changed, due to responses such as restricted movement and lockdowns.¹ However, most reports and articles focused on changes in the crimes that were reported to the Police or other organisations, rather than changes in unreported crime.

The New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS) is an annual survey that measures changes in the proportion of crime that is reported and not reported to the Police. This report examines long-term changes in victimisation and crime-reporting behaviour in New Zealand since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

This report uses data from the first five cycles of the NZCVS, which cover the period from 2018 to 2022. Rather than provide an exhaustive analysis, the report focuses on the most important changes in crime and victimisation,² by comparing data collected for the NZCVS before the first nationwide lockdown (1 March 2018 to 21 March 2020) with data afterwards (3 July 2020 to 14 November 2022).

In the two years before the pandemic, the NZCVS did not reveal any changes in victimisation or reporting behaviour. However, since the outbreak of the pandemic, we have observed these trends that reflect long-term changes in victimisation and reporting behaviour:

- A decrease in the proportion of households that were burgled.
- An increase in the proportion of people who experienced fraud and deception.
- An increase in the proportion of people who reported experiencing sexual assault during their lifetime.
- A change in people's perception that interpersonal violence is "just something that happens" to something that is "crime".
- A decrease in reporting crime to the Police.

Details on the size of these changes and who experienced them are provided in the key findings section below and are explored in more depth throughout the report. Where possible the findings are also contextualised in terms of when they occurred following the outbreak of COVID-19 and compared to similar trends observed overseas. The report's findings reflect long-term trends in crime and victimisation since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, due to the survey design, estimates of crime since the initial outbreak are not completely accurate and reported trends cannot be attributed to any specific parts of the pandemic response, such as lockdowns.

¹ For example, see [Wiggins, A. 2021. Covid 19 coronavirus: Crime plummets during lockdown and remains below pre-Covid levels. *New Zealand Herald*. 23 March](#); [McClure, T. 2022. After Covid, crime swells in New Zealand's empty city centres. *The Guardian*. 14 May](#); [Wade, A. No coincidence there's ram raid spike after Auckland's long COVID-19 lockdown, Oranga Tamariki says. *Newshub*. 29 September](#); [Leask, A. 2020. Domestic violence increases rapidly in New Zealand – strangulation, beatings 'commonplace' in 2020. *New Zealand Herald*. 2 September](#).

² Refer to the [published data tables](#) for a full list of statistics and changes.

Key findings

Following the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak New Zealanders experienced fewer burglaries, but more fraud and deception offences.

- The rate of overall crime and victimisation remained stable at 30%.
- The proportion of households or adults that experienced a burglary decreased significantly from 12% to 9%.
- The proportion of households or adults that experienced a one-off offence by a family member decreased significantly from 1.4% to 0.9%.
- The proportion of adults who experienced fraud and deception rose significantly from 6% to 8%.
- The proportion of adults who experienced sexual assault in their lifetime rose significantly from 24% to 26%.
- Only adults who experienced crime infrequently (once in 12 months) experienced a change in victimisation. Those who are more vulnerable to crime, and experience more than one incident in 12 months, did not experience a change in victimisation.

Demographic groups experienced changes in victimisation rates differently.

- Māori and Pacific adults experienced more significant decreases in burglaries than other ethnic groups.
- New Zealand European adults experienced more significant increases in fraud and deception offences than other ethnic groups.
- Adults who identify as LGBT+³ and adults who have a high personal income (\$100,000–\$150,000 annually) experienced the most significant increases in fraud and deception offences.
- All demographic groups experienced an increase in lifetime sexual assault, but those who usually face the highest risk of victimisation (such as adults aged 20 to 29 years and LGBT+ adults) experienced the biggest increases.

New Zealanders were less likely than before to perceive that crime is driven by racial or sexual discrimination.

- The percentage of New Zealanders who perceived, overall, that crime is driven by discrimination did not change significantly.
- The percentage of New Zealanders who perceived that household offences are driven by racial discrimination decreased significantly, from 4% to 2%.
- The percentage of New Zealanders who perceived that sexual assault is driven by discrimination related to the victim's sexuality decreased significantly, from 39% to 18%.⁴

³ LGBT+ is a demographic group that includes transgender people and people who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or having another sexual identity. See [About the NZCVS Cycle 5](#) for definitions of key terms.

⁴ These percentages have a margin of error between 10 and 20 percentage points, or the estimate/mean has a relative sampling error between 20% and 50%, so it should be used cautiously.

Adults were more likely than before to perceive interpersonal violence offences and offences by family members as “crimes”.

- Adults were more likely to perceive offences they experienced as “crimes” and significantly less likely to perceive them as “just something that happens”.
- Adults’ changing perceptions towards offences applied especially to interpersonal violence offences (this includes sexual assaults) and offences by family members.
- Adults’ changing perceptions towards offences may help explain an increase in the rate of adults who experienced lifetime sexual assault.

More New Zealanders than ever perceived that the offences they experienced were serious.

- Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the perceived seriousness of offences slightly increased. Adults rated significantly fewer offences as 0 out of 10 in terms of seriousness, and significantly more offences as 2 out of 10.

The rates of reporting crime to the Police significantly decreased, but this was not driven by changes in adults’ perceptions of the Police.

- Overall, victimisation has not changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began, but the rate at which adults report crime incidents to the Police has significantly decreased.
- The percentage of incidents that adults reported to the Police decreased significantly from 26% to 21% – this decrease is mostly driven by the same factors reported in Cycle 5.
- As noted in Cycle 5, the decrease in the proportion of incidents reported is primarily driven by highly victimised adults reporting a smaller proportion of incidents.⁵
- The percentage of victims who reported at least one offence decreased significantly from 38% to 34%⁶ – this decrease was affected by the increase in the prevalence of fraud and deception which has a low average reporting rate. This trend is now reversing when comparing results from Cycle 5 to Cycle 4.
- All demographic groups reported fewer incidents, but the rate of reporting at least one offence to the Police was especially low for victims who are Chinese or LGBT+, or who have a low personal or household income.
- Adults’ reasons for not reporting crime have not changed significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic began, which suggests that decreased reporting is not driven by changes in people’s perceptions of the Police.

Some demographic groups were more likely to feel safe than others.

- Overall, adults’ perceptions of safety have not changed significantly since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Some demographic groups at low risk of victimisation did have a significantly higher perception of safety following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. These groups include adults who are heterosexual, New Zealand Europeans, retired, aged 65 years and over, and live in Hawke’s Bay, Wellington, or Southland.

⁵ For more details refer to [Key findings – Cycle 5 report: Descriptive statistics June 2023](#).

⁶ This percentage represents the average of Cycle 4 and 5 plus half of Cycle 3

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Contributors

Dr Tadhg Daly and Dr Minh Vo wrote this report and Tianying Chu conducted all the analysis. When the report was published, all authors were employed by the Ministry of Justice Research and Evaluation team.

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NZCVS Project Team

1 About this report

1.1 Purpose

This report examines the effects of COVID-19 on victimisation and crime-reporting behaviour in New Zealand.

New Zealand confirmed its first case of COVID-19 on 28 February 2020. By 19 March the government had closed the country's borders to all non-citizens and non-residents, and by 26 March the country entered a nationwide lockdown under the COVID-19 alert-level system.

From 26 March 2020 to 12 September 2022, New Zealand dealt with various COVID-19 outbreaks and operated under several different government restrictions. The pandemic continued beyond September 2022, but most government restrictions ended when the COVID-19 Protection Framework ceased.

Since the pandemic began, numerous reports and articles have been written about how crime has changed, due to responses such as restricted movement and lockdowns.⁷ However, most reports and articles focused on changes in the crimes that were reported to the Police or other organisations, rather than changes in unreported crime.

The New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS) is an annual, nationwide, face-to-face, random-sample survey. It involves interviewing adults aged 15 years and over, who live in a private dwelling, about their experiences of crime in New Zealand over the previous 12 months. Their experience includes crime incidents reported to the Police and unreported incidents.

1.2 Impact of COVID-19 on the NZCVS

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the associated government responses, affected the NZCVS interviews in numerous ways. For example, we had to pause interviewing while New Zealand was at Levels 3 and 4 under the COVID-19 alert-level system. We also had to pause face-to-face interviews when New Zealand was at the red traffic light setting under the COVID-19 Protection Framework; however, by then we were able to substitute them with virtual interviews.

COVID-19 restrictions had specific effects on interviewing for Cycles 3, 4 and 5 of the NZCVS.

⁷ For example, see [Wiggins, A. 2021. Covid 19 coronavirus: Crime plummets during lockdown and remains below pre-Covid levels. *New Zealand Herald*. 23 March](#); [McClure, T. 2022. After Covid, crime swells in New Zealand's empty city centres. *The Guardian*. 14 May](#); [Wade, A. No coincidence there's ram raid spike after Auckland's long COVID-19 lockdown, Oranga Tamariki says. *Newshub*. 29 September](#); [Leask, A. 2020. Domestic violence increases rapidly in New Zealand – strangulation, beatings 'commonplace' in 2020. *New Zealand Herald*. 2 September](#).

Cycle 3

We paused interviewing between 21 March and 2 July 2020, because of the first nationwide lockdown. We had to extend the interviewing period by six weeks and reduce the annual sample size from 8,000 to 7,425 adults.

Cycle 4

We paused interviewing – nationally and regionally – on multiple occasions, because of the ongoing Delta outbreak.⁸ We had to extend the planned interviewing period and reduce the annual sample size from 8,000 to 6,244 adults. The response rate decreased from 80% in Cycle 3 to 76% in Cycle 4.

Cycle 5

We paused face-to-face interviews between 23 January and 13 April 2022, when the governments imposed a red traffic light setting during the Omicron outbreak. Fortunately, by then we were able to substitute in-person face-to-face interviews with newly developed virtual face-to-face interviews.⁹ However, the pandemic drove resistance to completing the survey, and this resistance peaked during Cycle 5. As a result, the annual sample size fell from 8,000 to 5,326 adults, and the response rate decreased to 71%.

1.3 Scope

The report uses data from the first five cycles of the NZCVS, which cover the period from 2018 to 2022. It compares two samples of data:

1. **Before COVID-19 Outbreak** – data collected for the NZCVS before the first nationwide lockdown (1 March 2018 to 21 March 2020).
2. **After COVID-19 Outbreak** – data collected for the NZCVS after the first nationwide lockdown (3 July 2020 to 14 November 2022).

Table 1-1 gives more details of each data sample.

We chose to differentiate between the periods before and after the first nationwide lockdown, because the introduction of the lockdown reflects when we had to pause the survey interviews.

⁸ Refer to page 4 of [Survey findings – Cycle 4 report: Descriptive statistics June 2022](#) for details of when and where we paused interviewing.

⁹ Refer to the [Cycle 5 methodology report](#) for details of how we developed and used virtual face-to-face interviews.

Table 1-1. Before COVID-19 Outbreak and After COVID-19 Outbreak data samples

	Before COVID-19 Outbreak	After COVID-19 Outbreak
Interview period	1 March 2018–20 March 2020	3 July 2020–14 November 2022
Victimisation period	1 March 2017–20 March 2020	3 July 2019–14 November 2022
Sample size	20,680	14,383
In-person interviews	20,680	13,118
Virtual interviews	0	1,265
Response rate	80.6%	74.0%

1.4 Limitations

The NZCVS asks respondents about events they experienced in the last 12 months. Therefore, in the After COVID-19 Outbreak data sample, some people’s experiences of being victimised occurred before the pandemic started.

This overlap between two time periods is not ideal for this type of analysis; however, if we removed from the sample the interviews that fall into the overlapping period, we would lose crucial information about victimisation that occurred following the first nationwide lockdown. As overlap between samples is consistent with all change data reported in NZCVS annual reports, we assess this overlap is more likely to smooth out or underestimate changes over time rather than exaggerate or overestimate them.

We weighted both data samples to make sure they accurately represent the New Zealand population before and after the first nationwide lockdown. However, due to the survey design, and different sample sizes, response rates and interview modes after the first nationwide lockdown, some of the estimates¹⁰ in this report are not fully accurate. Therefore, we advise you to interpret the results cautiously. Also, while the findings in this report reflect general changes in crime and victimisation since the pandemic started, we cannot attribute these changes to any specific parts of the response, such as lockdowns.

1.5 How to read this report

This report contains graphs, tables and infographics to help you visualise key facts and findings. These are based on data tables that accompany this report, which are available on the [Ministry of Justice website](#).

We recommend you also read [About the NZCVS Cycle 5 reports](#), for details of the key terms and colour codes we use throughout this report, and explanations of rounding, confidence intervals and significance testing.

¹⁰ Estimates of percentage change, and estimates related to the After COVID-19 Outbreak data sample are not fully accurate.

2 Changes in crime since the COVID-19 outbreak

The NZCVS provides a unique picture of how crime and victimisation have changed since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, because it captures incidents of crime that are not officially reported. This report examines what changed, by measuring the prevalence and incidence of crime and victimisation that people experienced in a 12-month period:¹¹

We define the **prevalence rate** as the percentage of adults or households that were victims of crime on one or more occasions. It helps us understand how victimisation is distributed across the New Zealand population.

We define the **incidence rate** as the number of offences per 100 adults or households. It helps us understand the intensity or amount of crime that New Zealanders experience.

2.1 Changes were driven by changes in experiencing specific types of crime

Overall, the percentage of adults who were victims of crime (prevalence rate) and the rate of crime that adults experienced (incidence rate), before and after the outbreak of COVID-19, did not change significantly.

The overall prevalence rate remained stable at 30%, but there were significant changes in the prevalence rate for some specific types of crime (see Table 2-1). While the incidence rate increased from 60 incidents per 100 adults to 67 incidents per 100 adults, this change was not statistically significant.

¹¹ The NZCVS also measures prevalence (the number of adults or households that were victimised once or more) and incidence (the number of crime incidents that adults or households have experienced). However, these measures are only relevant when we compare them for time periods of equal length (such as the 12-month cycles we use in the NZCVS). Therefore, we have not used these measures in this report.

Table 2-1. Crime prevalence rates before and after the COVID-19 outbreak, by offence type

Offence type	Prevalence rate Before COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Prevalence rate After COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Percentage point change (%) ^a
All offences	30.2	29.7	-0.5
Household offences	20.0	18.2	-1.8
Personal offences	14.8	15.8	+1.0
Burglary	11.6	9.5	-2.1
Fraud and deception	6.2	7.9	+1.7
Interpersonal violence	7.3	6.9	-0.4
Vehicle offences	5.9	6.1	+0.2
Theft and damage offences	4.8	4.6	-0.2
Trespass	1.9	2.1	+0.2

Notes

a. The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.

The statistically significant findings were:

- The percentage of households that experienced a household offence significantly decreased from 20% before the COVID-19 outbreak to 18% afterwards.
- The main reason that household offences declined after the COVID-19 outbreak was that a smaller percentage of households experienced burglary (the prevalence rate of burglary decreased significantly from 12% to 10%).
- The percentage of adults who experienced a fraud and deception offence significantly increased from 6% before the COVID-19 outbreak to 8% afterwards.
- The incidence rate of fraud increased significantly from 8 per 100 adults before the COVID-19 outbreak to 9 per 100 adults afterwards.
- The percentage of adults experiencing any sexual assault in their lifetime increased significantly from 24% before the COVID-19 outbreak to 26% afterwards.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak we had not observed any statistically significant changes in the prevalence and incidence rates for specific types of crime. However, from Survey findings – Cycle 5 report: Descriptive statistics June 2023 and previous reports,¹² we know that the changes we observed after the outbreak occurred at different times:

- The reduction in burglary started in Cycle 3 (2019/20).
- The increase in experience of sexual assault in a lifetime started in Cycle 4 (2020/21).
- The increase in fraud and deception started in Cycle 5 (2021/22).

¹² All NZCVS reports are available on the [Ministry of Justice website](#).

Although we do not know what caused these changes, the different start points for each change suggest they were all driven by distinct causal factors.

The reduction in burglary and increase in fraud and deception have also been observed in England and Wales over similar timeframes¹³ and are thought to be connected with changes in behaviour after the COVID-19 pandemic started, such as more people working remotely and shopping online.

2.2 Changes were driven by changes in one-off events rather than repeat offences

The NZCVS measures how crime is distributed – whether victims experience crime evenly, or whether some victims experience a disproportionate amount of crime.

We measure the distribution of crime in two ways:

1. **Multiple victimisation** means a person has been a victim of crime more than once in the previous 12 months, regardless of the type of offence. For example, a person may have been assaulted, had their car stolen and had their house burgled.
2. **Repeat victimisation** means a person has been a victim of the same crime more than once in the previous 12 months. For example, a person may have had their house burgled twice.

We analysed the rates of one-off and repeat victimisation before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This allowed us to see whether there were any changes in the proportion of adults or households experiencing repeat victimisation before and after the outbreak of COVID-19 (see **Figure 2-1**).

¹³ Kirchmaier, T, Villa-Llera, C, Agrawal and Shubhangi. 2022. *Burglaries and robberies fell during COVID – but in the poorest parts of Britain, violent crime is up*. LSE.

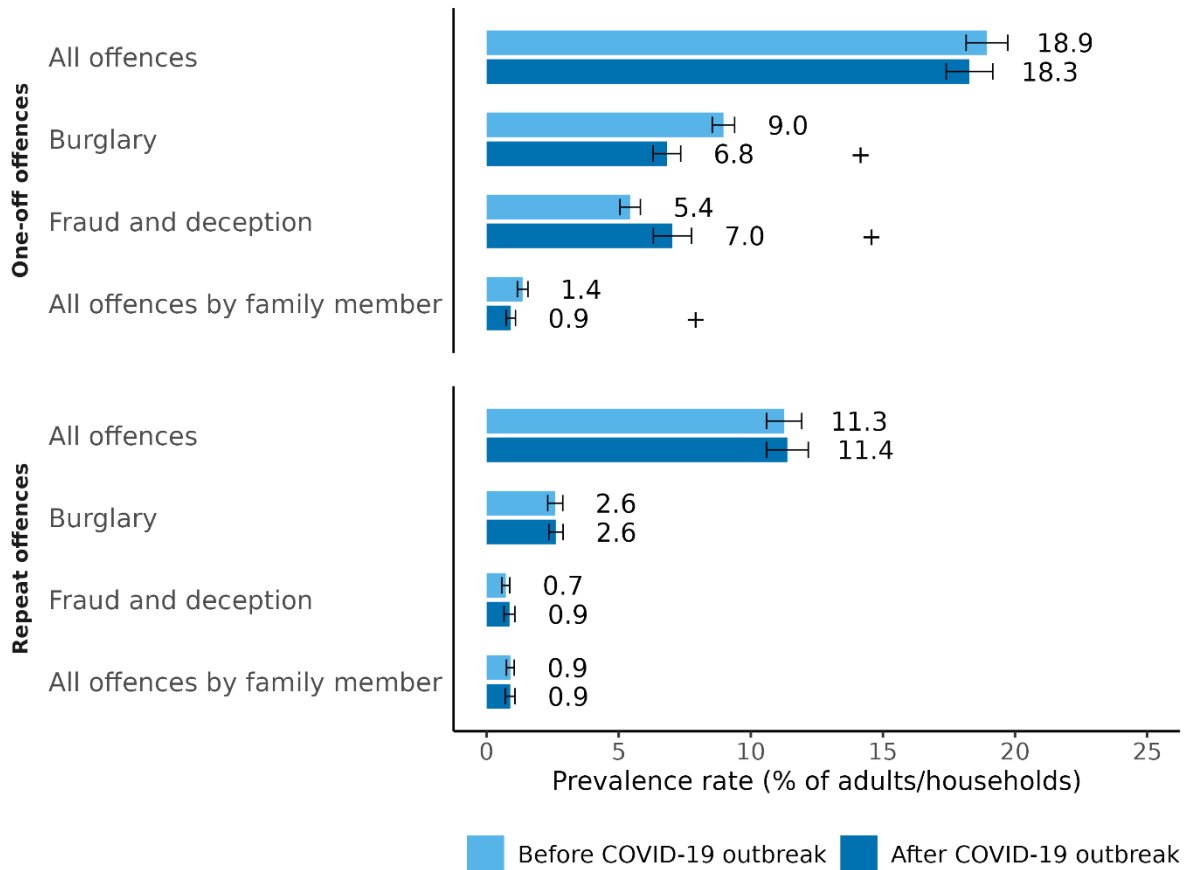


Figure 2-1. Percentage of adults or households victimised once or more before and after the outbreak of COVID-19, by offence type

Note

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

+ sign means that the difference between the two time periods was statistically significant

Prevalence rates for burglary are measured in % of households, all other prevalence rates are measured in % of adults.

As **Figure 2-1** shows, the overall rates of multiple victimisations did not change significantly: 11% of adults experienced multiple offences before and after the outbreak of COVID-19. However, there were significant changes in the rate of one-off victimisation for specific offence types:

- The percentage of households that experienced a one-off burglary significantly decreased from 9% before the COVID-19 outbreak to 7% afterwards.
- The percentage of adults who experienced a one-off fraud and deception offence significantly increased from 5% before the COVID-19 outbreak to 7% afterwards.
- The percentage of adults who experienced a one-off offence by a family member significantly decreased from 1.4% before the COVID-19 outbreak to 0.9% afterwards.

These findings suggest that only adults who experience crime infrequently (once in 12 months) experienced a change in victimisation. Those who are generally more vulnerable to crime, and experience more than one incident in 12 months, did not experience a change in victimisation.

2.3 Changes in experiencing sexual assault in a lifetime were driven by changes in non-consensual sexual touches

The NZCVS asks adults questions about crimes they have experienced in the last 12 months. It also asks questions about people's experiences of partner or sexual assault in their lifetime. Unlike our 12-month statistics, this data tells us what proportion of the population *has ever* experienced sexual assault or violence by their partner.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, the percentage of New Zealand adults who reported ever having experienced sexual assault rose significantly from 24% to 26%. This finding was consistent across different types of sexual assault, but the only statistically significant increases were in the prevalence rates of having ever experienced non-consensual sexual touches or any sexual assault (see Table 2-2).

Table 2-2. Prevalence rate of experiencing sexual assault in a lifetime, before and after the COVID-19 outbreak

Type of sexual assault	Prevalence rate Before COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Prevalence rate After COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Percentage point change (%) ^a
Forced intercourse	13.6	14.9	+1.3
Non-consensual sexual touches	23.3	25.6	+2.3
Any sexual assault	23.5	25.9	+2.4

Notes

a. The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.

The statistically significant findings were:

- The percentage of adults who reported ever having experienced sexual assault in their lifetime significantly increased from 24% before the COVID-19 outbreak to 26% afterwards.
- The percentage of adults who reported ever having experienced non-consensual sexual touches in their lifetime significantly increased from 23% before the COVID-19 outbreak to 26% afterwards.

We first observed these significant increases in Cycle 4 (2020/21), and they remained elevated in Cycle 5 (2021/22).

2.4 Increases in experiencing sexual assault in a lifetime may reflect changing perceptions

The prevalence rate of experiencing sexual assault in a lifetime increased significantly after the outbreak of COVID-19. However, the prevalence rate of experiencing sexual assault in the previous 12 months did not increase¹⁴ (see Table 2-3).

One explanation for this contradictory finding is that the increase in experiencing sexual assault in a lifetime does not actually reflect an increase in this crime since the COVID-19 pandemic started, but a change in people's perceptions of this crime. That is, as adults become better informed about this crime, they may be more likely to recognise past events as sexual assault.

We observed changes in people's perceptions of physical and sexual assault offences following the outbreak of COVID-19, which supports this theory. Specifically, since the COVID-19 pandemic started, adults are more likely to view interpersonal violence offences (this includes sexual assault) and offences by family members as crimes (see Section 4.2 for more details of how perceptions of crime have changed).

Table 2-3. Prevalence rate of experiencing interpersonal violence and violence by family members in the previous 12 months, before and after the COVID-19 outbreak

Offence type	Prevalence rate Before COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Prevalence rate After COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Percentage point change (%)
Interpersonal violence	7.3	6.9	-0.4
Sexual assault	2.0	2.0	0
Offence by a family member	2.2	1.8	-0.5
Offence by an intimate partner	1.5	1.1	-0.4

¹⁴ We structure the 12-month measure of sexual assault differently to the lifetime measure of experiencing sexual assault. Lifetime sexual assault covers forced intercourse and unwanted touching, including attempts of these acts. Unlike the past 12-month measure, it does not ask if a victim was forced to perform other sexual acts or received threats of a sexual nature. Also different from the past 12-month measure, responses of "don't know" or "don't wish to answer" were assumed to be an experience of sexual assault and included in these estimates.

3 Changes in who experiences crime since the COVID-19 outbreak

In Section 2 we showed which types of crime increased or decreased after the COVID-19 pandemic started. However, these changes were not experienced equally by all demographic groups. This section explores which demographic groups were more likely to experience changes in crime.

3.1 High-risk groups experienced the biggest decreases in burglary

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, most demographic groups experienced a significant decrease in burglary;¹⁵ however, those that experienced the biggest decreases were those who are usually at the highest risk of being burgled (see Table 3-1).

¹⁵ [Data tables](#) provide the full list of significant decreases by demographic groups.

Table 3-1. Prevalence rate of burglary, by demographic group, before and after the COVID-19 outbreak

Demographic group	Prevalence rate Before COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Prevalence rate After COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Percentage point change (%) ^a
New Zealand average	11.6	9.5	-2.1
Couple with child(ren) and other person(s) household	13.3	7.9 ^c	-5.4
NZDep2018 quintile 5 (most deprived)	17.8*	12.8*	-5
Household income is \$40,000–\$50,000	12.7	8.0 ^c	-4.7
Pacific	16.3 ^b	11.7 ^c	-4.6
Two-or-more children household	14.9 ^b	10.8	-4.1
Māori¹⁶	16.0 ^b	12.0 ^b	-4
Five-or-more people household	15.3 ^b	11.8 ^b	-3.5
Auckland	13.9 ^b	10.8	-3.1

Notes

- a. The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.
- b. The prevalence rate is statistically significantly different to the New Zealand average, or the relevant total, at the 95% confidence level.
- c. The numerator or denominator of the ratio estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.

As Table 3-1 shows, Māori and Pacific adults, adults living in Auckland, adults living on a lower household income (\$40,000–\$50,000), adults living in the most deprived neighbourhoods, adults living in households with more than one child and adults living in households with more than four people experienced significantly fewer burglaries (between 3 to 5 percentage points less) after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁶ The NZCVS interviews only one respondent per household. The survey defines burglary as an offence towards the household. Therefore, a decrease in burglary for Māori or Pacific adults does not represent a decrease in burglary for Māori or Pacific households per se. Instead, it represents a decrease in burglary of households that include at least one Māori or Pacific adult.

3.2 Mostly low-risk groups experienced significant increases in fraud

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, most demographic groups experienced an increase in fraud and deception offences;¹⁷ however, mostly only groups that are usually less likely to experience crime experienced a significant increase in fraud (see Table 3-2).

Table 3-2. Prevalence rate of fraud and deception offences, by demographic group, before and after the COVID-19 outbreak

Demographic group	Prevalence rate Before COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Prevalence rate After COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Percentage point change (%) ^a
New Zealand average	6.2	7.9	+1.7
LGBT+	7.1 ^c	13.7 ^{b c}	+6.4
Personal income is \$100,000–\$150,000	5.2 ^c	11.5 ^{b c}	+6.3
Couple with child(ren) household	7	9.9	+2.9
NZDep2018 Quintile 3	5.9	8.8 ^c	+2.9
Rents privately	5.5	8.3 [‡]	+2.8
Perception of safety is 9 out of 10	6.3	8.9 ^c	+2.6
Life satisfaction is 9 out of 10	5.5	7.9	+2.4
No limits to affording a \$300 non-essential item	6	8.3	+2.3
Married/civil union/de facto	6.5	8.7	+2.2
Employed	6.5	8.7	+2.2
NZ European	6.6	8.6	+2.0
Lives in a major urban area	6.5	8.5	+2.0
Male	5.8	7.8	+2.0
Experiencing low level of psychological distress	6	7.6	+1.6
Owns a house (including with mortgage)	6.5	7.9	+1.5

Notes

- The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.
- The prevalence rate is statistically significantly different to the New Zealand average, or the relevant total, at the 95% confidence level.
- The numerator or denominator of the ratio estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.

¹⁷ [Data tables](#) provide give the full list of significant increases by demographic groups.

As Table 3-2 shows, adults who are generally at lower risk of victimisation (that is New Zealand Europeans; males; adults who are married or in a civil union or de facto relationship; adults who are employed or earning a high income; and adults who report high wellbeing) experienced a significant increase in fraud.

However, the two largest increases in fraud were experienced by adults who earn \$100,000 to \$150,000 and adults who identify as LGBT+. The increase in fraud for both these groups was 6 percentage points, which is over three times more than the average increase (1.7 percentage points).

3.3 High-risk groups experienced the biggest increases in sexual assault during a lifetime

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a wide range of demographic groups experienced an increase in sexual assault over a lifetime;¹⁸ however, demographic groups who are already at higher risk of this crime than the average New Zealander experienced the most significant increases (between 6 percentage points and 13 percentage points greater than the New Zealand average) (see Table 3-3). These groups are adults who identify as LGBT+, adults aged 20 to 29-years, adults in a partnership that is not legally registered,¹⁹ adults who are under greater financial pressure and adults who are experiencing moderate levels of psychological distress. Among these demographic groups, this pattern is reasonably consistent for non-consensual sexual touches and forced intercourse.²⁰

In Section 4.2, we explained that we did not observe similar increases in adults' experiences of sexual assault within the previous 12 months (see Table 2-3) and that the increases in experiences of sexual assault over a lifetime may reflect changing perceptions of these crimes since the outbreak of COVID-19²¹ (see Section 4.2 for more details on changing perceptions of crime). If this theory is correct, bigger increases for specific demographic groups may reflect more widespread changes in perceptions among those groups. Alternatively, they may be explained by people in those groups being more likely to have experienced incidents in the past that they now accurately recognise as sexual assault once perceptions have changed. Recent changes in people's perceptions of sexual assault have also been observed in Australia.²² This change has been attributed to social campaigns against sexual assault, like the Me Too movement.

¹⁸ [Data tables](#) give the full list of significant increases by demographic groups.

¹⁹ A non-legally registered partnership is a relationship that is not a marriage, civil union or de facto relationship.

²⁰ [Data tables](#) give the full list of significant decreases by demographic groups.

²¹ We have no evidence to suggest that changing perceptions were specifically caused by events associated with COVID-19. We also do not have a leading hypothesis on what may have caused perceptions to change since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

²² [Sweeney, L. 2021. Grace Tame says change is a marathon effort. But Australia Talks data shows our perception of sexual assault is changing. ABC News. 10 June.](#)

Table 3-3. Prevalence rate of experiencing sexual assault in a lifetime, by demographic group, before and after the COVID-19 outbreak

Demographic group	Prevalence rate Before COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Prevalence rate After COVID-19 Outbreak (%)	Percentage point change (%) ^a
New Zealand average	23.5	25.9	+2.4
LGBT+	45.2 ^b	58.6 ^b	+13.4
Transgender²³	31.2 ^c	47.2 ^{b c}	+16.0
Partnered, not legally registered	27.6 ^b	38.5 ^b	+10.9
Experiencing moderate level of psychological distress	38.4 ^b	48.5 ^b	+10.1
20–29 years old	23.6	31.5	+7.9
Very limited ability to afford a \$300 non-essential item	27.4 ^b	33.8 ^b	+6.4
Non-partnered	26.5 ^b	30.2 ^b	+3.7
Female	34.8 ^b	37.9 ^b	+3.1
NZ European	26.5 ^b	29.3 ^b	+2.8
Cisgender²⁴	23.5	25.7	+2.2
Non-disabled	23.3	25.5	+2.2
Disabled	28.1 ^b	36.2 ^b	+8.1
No limit to affording a \$300 non-essential item	19.2 ^b	21.3 ^b	+2.1
Non-LGBT+	22.7	24.5	+1.8
Experiencing low level of psychological distress	21.0 ^b	22.8 ^b	+1.8

Notes

- The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.
- The prevalence rate is statistically significantly different to the New Zealand average, or the relevant total, at the 95% confidence level.
- The numerator or denominator of the ratio estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.

²³ The NZCVS defines a transgender adult as one who reports their gender is different from their sex at birth. Transgender adults are also included in the LGBT+ group, along with adults who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, or another sexuality. Refer to [About the NZCVS Cycle 5 reports](#) for details of key terms.

²⁴ The NZCVS defines a cisgender adult as one who reports their gender is the same as their sex at birth. Refer to [About the NZCVS Cycle 5 reports](#) for details of key terms.

4 Changes in perceptions of crime since the COVID-19 outbreak

In this section, we examine whether survey respondents perceive the incidents they experienced were driven by discrimination; whether they would describe the incidents as crimes; and how serious they perceive the incidents to be.

4.1 People perceived fewer household offences as driven by racial discrimination

The NZCVS asks survey respondents whether they believe the incidents they experienced happened, at least partly, because of the offender's attitudes towards these attributes of themselves:

- Race, ethnicity or nationality.
- Sexuality or sexual orientation.
- Age.
- Sex.²⁵
- Religious, ethical or political beliefs.
- Disability (if applicable).

We found no significant difference between the overall rate of incidents driven by discrimination before (19% of incidents) and after (17% of incidents) the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 4-1).

However, the perceived contribution of discrimination changed significantly for some types of offences:

- The proportion of sexual assaults that were perceived as driven by discrimination against the victim's sexuality decreased significantly, from 39% before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to 18% afterwards.²⁶
- The proportion of incidents related to damage to motor vehicles that were perceived as driven by discrimination decreased significantly, from 7.7% before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to 2.5% afterwards.
- The proportion of household offences that were perceived as driven by discrimination against the victim's race decreased significantly, from 4.3% before

²⁵ In line with Stats NZ new gender standards, we have changed "sex" to "gender or sex" in Cycle 6 (2022/23).

²⁶ The percentage has a margin of error of 20% to 50%, or the estimate/mean has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so should be used cautiously.

the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to 1.7% afterwards. These significant decreases include:

- Perceived racial discrimination related to motor vehicle offences dropping from 5% to 1.3%.
- Perceived racial discrimination related to theft offences dropping from 6.1% to 0.3%.
- Perceived racial discrimination related to trespass incidents dropping from 4.2% to 0.4%.²⁷

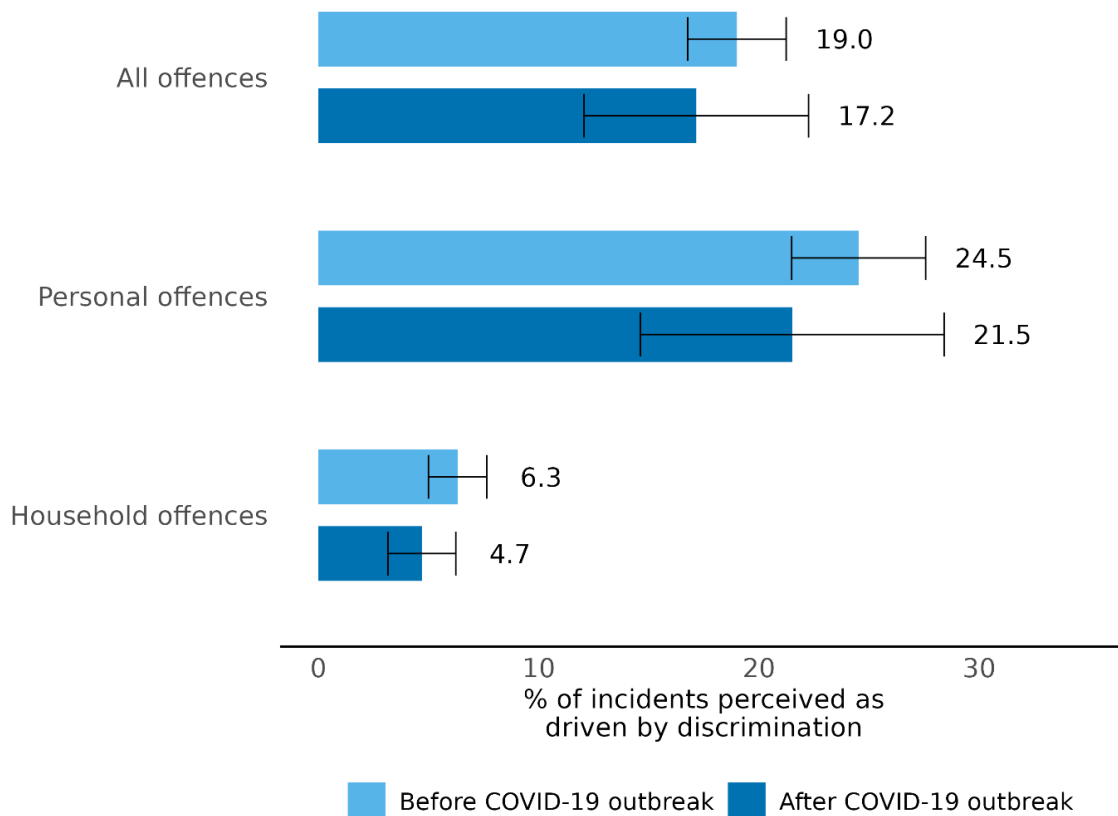


Figure 4-1. Percentage of incidents perceived by the victim to be driven by discrimination before and after the outbreak of COVID-19, by offence type

Note

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

²⁷ The numerator or denominator of the ratio estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.

4.2 People’s perceptions of crime changed

The NZCVS asks survey respondents whether they would describe the incidents they experienced as:

- A crime.
- Wrong, but not a crime.
- Just something that happens.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the proportion of incidents perceived as “just something that happens” decreased significantly, from 15% of all incidents before the outbreak to 9% afterwards (see Figure 4-2).

After the COVID-19 outbreak, the percentage of incidents perceived as “crime” increased from 66% to 70%, although this increase was not statistically significant.

The percentage of incidents considered “wrong, but not a crime” remained stable.

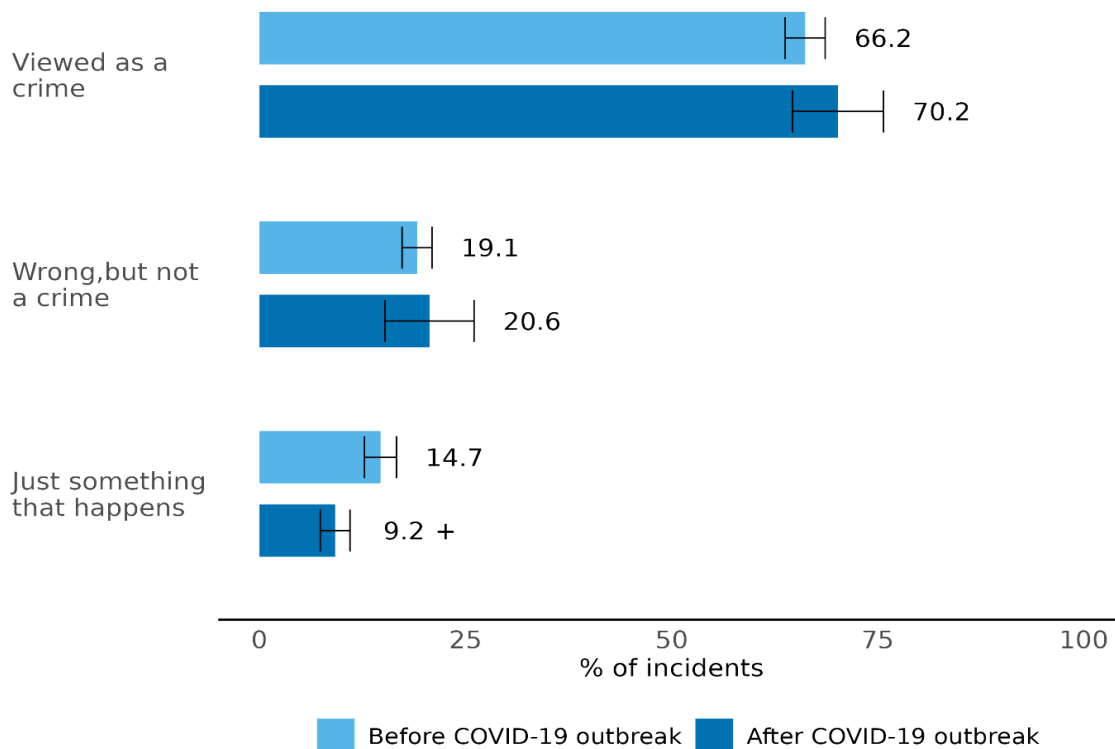


Figure 4-2. Percentage of incidents perceived by victims to be a crime, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19

Note

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

+ sign means that the difference between the two time periods was statistically significant

4.3 Changing perceptions of interpersonal violence and offences by family members drove changes in overall perceptions of crime

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, for specific offence types there were no significant differences in the percentage of incidents that people viewed as a “crime” or “wrong but not a crime”. However, overall fewer crimes were viewed as “just something that happens”, and this was driven by a significant reduction in the percentage of personal offences that people viewed as “just something that happens” (see Table 4-1). In particular, the percentage of interpersonal violence offences that people viewed as “just something that happens” dropped significantly from 24% before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to 11% afterwards.²⁸ Conversely, the percentage of interpersonal violence offences that people viewed as a “crime” increased from 42% to 55%,²⁹ although the increase is not statistically significant.

The percentage of offences viewed as “just something that happens” for some subtypes of interpersonal violence also decreased significantly. The percentage of threats and damage offences viewed as “just something that happens” dropped from 16% to 6%; and the percentage of assaults (this includes sexual assault) and robberies viewed as “just something that happens” dropped from 30% to 16%.³⁰ These decreases were mirrored by increases in the percentage of these incidents viewed as “crime” (see Table 4-1), although the increases were not statistically significant.

The percentage of offences by family members that people viewed as “just something that happens” also decreased significantly from 22% to 7%.³¹

This change in people’s perceptions that interpersonal violence offences are “just something that happens” started in Cycle 3 (2019/20) and has continued to decrease. The trend pre-dates the significant increase in lifetime sexual assault, which we first detected in Cycle 4 (2020/21); however, it may still help explain our finding that experiences of sexual assault in a lifetime have increased while experiences of sexual assault in the previous 12 months remained flat.

²⁸ The numerator or denominator of the ratio estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.

²⁹ The percentage has a margin of error of between 10 and 20 percentage points, or the estimate/mean has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so should be used cautiously.

³⁰ The numerator or denominator of the ratio estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.

³¹ The numerator or denominator of the ratio estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.

Australia has observed a similar change in people’s perceptions of sexual assault,³² but we were unable to find any recent reports on changes in lifetime sexual assault from other countries to compare with the New Zealand finding.

Table 4-1. Percentage of incidents perceived by victims to be a crime, by offence type, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19

Offence type	Incidents viewed as a “crime” (%)			Incidents viewed as “just something that happens” (%)		
	Before COVID-19 Outbreak	After COVID-19 Outbreak	Percentage point change (%) ^a	Before COVID-19 Outbreak	After COVID-19 Outbreak	Percentage point change (%) ^a
All offences	66.2	70.2	+4.0	14.7	9.2	-5.5
Household offences	79.8	79.3	-0.5	8.5	8.2	-0.3
Personal offences	59.9	66.8	+6.9	17.6	9.6	-8.0
Interpersonal violence	42.0	54.7 ^b	+12.7	24.0	11.3 ^c	-12.7
Threats and damages	48.3	67.3 ^b	+19.0	15.8	6.2 ^c	-9.6
Assault and robbery³³	37.3	42.9 ^b	+5.6	29.9	16.1 ^c	-13.8
Physical offences	46.9 ^c	53.0 ^b	+6.1	29.3	18.9 ^c	-10.4
Sexual assault	24.8 ^c	32.2 ^b	+7.4	30.7	13.2 ^c	-17.5
Offences by family members	49.2 ^b	S ^d	0.0	21.9	7.3 ^c	-14.6

Notes

- The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.
- The percentage has a margin of error of between 10 and 20 percentage points, or the estimate/mean has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so should be used cautiously.
- The numerator or denominator of the ratio estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.
- This result is suppressed, as the percentage has a margin of error greater than or equal to 20 percentage points, or the count estimate/mean has a relative sampling error greater than or equal to 50%, which we consider too unreliable for general use.

³² Sweeney, L. 2021. *Grace Tame says change is a marathon effort. But Australia Talks data shows our perception of sexual assault is changing.* ABC News. 10 June.

³³ Assault and robbery includes physical offences and sexual assault. Physical offences are assaults and robberies that do not involve sexual assault.

4.4 Changing perceptions of crime were shared by different demographic groups

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a few demographic groups were significantly more likely to perceive incidents as “crime” than before. These groups were Pacific adults, adults living in Wellington, adults living in three-person households and adults with limited ability to afford a non-essential \$300 item.

Most demographic groups perceived fewer crimes as “just something that happens”. For some demographic groups, these decreases were significant.³⁴

4.5 People’s perceptions of the seriousness of crime increased slightly

The NZCVS asks respondents to rank the seriousness of incidents they experienced from 0 (not serious at all) to 10 (most serious).

The percentage of incidents perceived to be “not serious at all” (ranked 0 out of 10) reduced significantly from 12.4% before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, to 3.5% afterwards. Meanwhile, the percentage of incidents ranked 2 out of 10 increased significantly, from 1.9% before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to 11.1% afterwards (see Figure 4-3).

We found this two-point ranking increase (from 0 to 2 out of 10) was significant for personal and household offences, and across broad offence types (burglary, trespass, vehicle offences, theft and damage offences, interpersonal violence offences, and fraud and cybercrime offences).

³⁴ [Data tables](#) provide the full list of significant decreases by demographic groups.

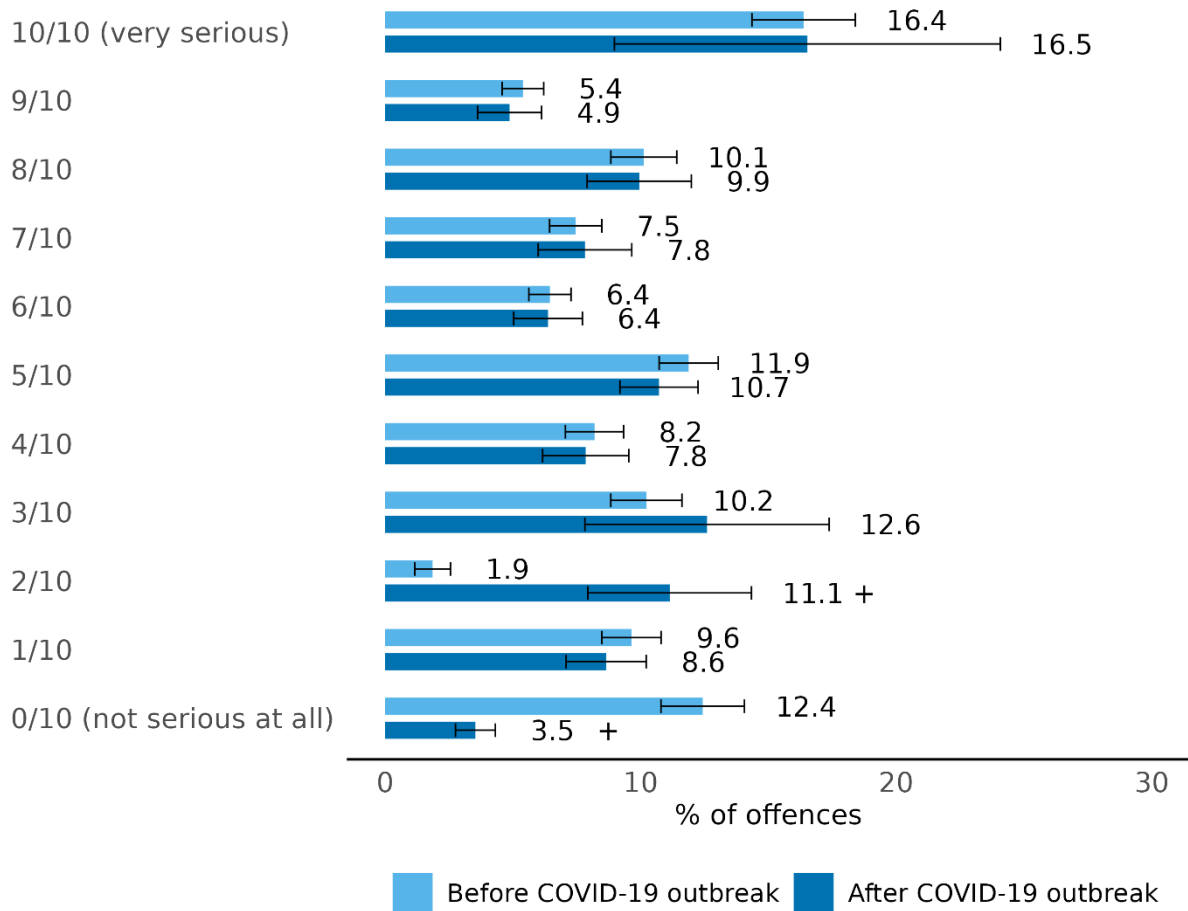


Figure 4-3. All incidents before and after the outbreak of COVID-19, by ranking of perceived seriousness

Note

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

+ sign means that the difference between the two time periods was statistically significant

5 Changes in reporting crime to the Police since the COVID-19 outbreak

The NZCVS asks respondents whether they reported the crimes they experienced to the Police. In this section, we look at how people's reporting behaviour has changed since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how those changes vary for different offence types and demographic groups. We also look at changes in the reasons people gave for not reporting crime to the Police.

5.1 Fewer people reported fewer incidents to the Police

The percentage of offences reported to the Police reduced significantly, from 26% before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, to 21% afterwards. This decrease was largely driven by the changes observed in Cycle 5 (2021/22) which showed highly victimised adults reporting a smaller proportion of incidents.

The percentage of victims who reported at least one incident to the Police also reduced significantly, from 38% before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, to 34% afterwards (see Figure 5-1).³⁵ This decrease started in Cycle 4 (2020/21), but this trend is now reversing in Cycle 5 (2021/22).³⁶

Further analysis suggests that the decrease in the percentage of victims who reported at least one offence is partly driven by the increase in fraud and deception which has a low average reporting rate (see Table 5-2). Removing fraud and deception from the analysis makes the decrease non-significant.

³⁵ The decreased reporting to the Police was observed during the period July 2019 to November 2022. This period may not align with more recent trends in reporting to the Police, observed in admin data (see [Section 1.3](#) for more details of the sample and time periods covered by this report). Also note that the NZCVS does not include crimes toward businesses (such as shoplifting); admin data indicates these crimes have been reported more frequently to the Police in recent years.

³⁶ In Cycle 5 (2021/22) 35% percent of victims reported at least one crime to the Police, compared with 33% in Cycle 4 (2020/21).

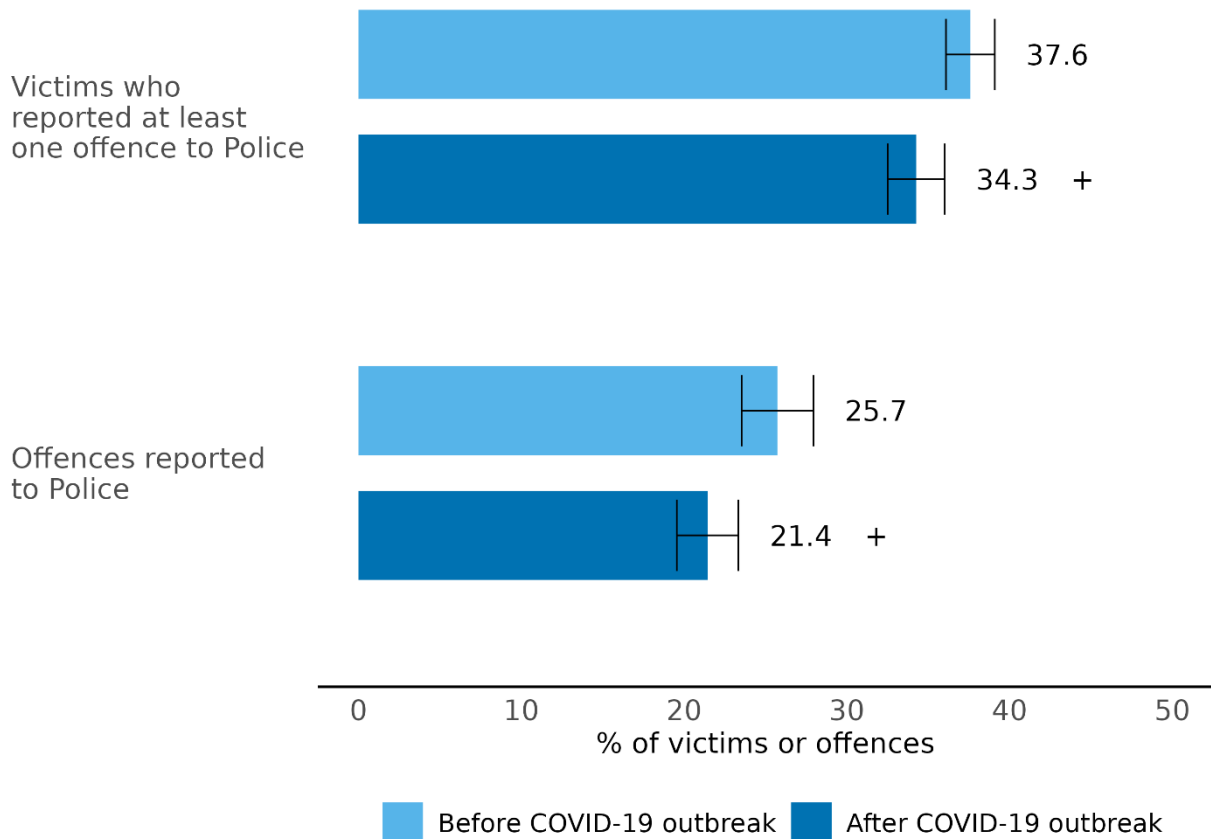


Figure 5-1. Percentage of victims who reported offences to the Police and percentage of offences reported, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19.

Note

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

+ sign means that the difference between the two time periods was statistically significant

Reports of offences, and reporting behaviour by victims, did not change significantly for particular types of offences.³⁷

The percentage of victims who reported at least one incident of harassment and threatening behaviour, or an offence by family member, remained stable, even though the percentage of these types of incidents that were reported to the Police decreased markedly following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 5-1). This suggests that, since the pandemic started, adults who experience multiple offences by a family member, or multiple incidents of harassment and threatening behaviour, were just as likely as before to report one of these events, but they were less likely than before to report multiple incidents.

³⁷ [Data tables](#) provide more details of reporting to the Police for different types of offences.

Table 5-1. Percentage of incidents reported to the Police and percentage of victims who reported at least one incident, by offence type, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19

Offence type	Incidents reported to the police (%)			Victims who reported at least one incident to the police (%)		
	Before COVID-19 Outbreak	After COVID-19 Outbreak	Percentage point change (%) ^a	Before COVID-19 Outbreak	After COVID-19 Outbreak	Percentage point change (%) ^a
All offences	25.7	21.5	-4.2	37.6	34.3	-3.3
Offences by family members	31.7	18.8	-12.9	42.4	42.4	0.0
Harassment and threatening behaviour	29.9	22.9	-7.0	36.0	39.6	+3.6

Notes

a. The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.

5.2 Some demographic groups were less likely to report crime to the Police

In most demographic groups, the percentage of adults who reported at least one incident to the Police decreased after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the decrease was statistically significant for adults who:

- Identify as Chinese (43% before the pandemic outbreak to 24% afterwards).³⁸
- Identify as New Zealand European (37% before the pandemic outbreak to 33% afterwards).
- Identify as LGBT+ (44% before the pandemic outbreak to 26% afterwards).
- Own their own home (35% before the pandemic outbreak to 31% afterwards).
- Have a personal income of \$30,000–\$40,000 (41% before the pandemic outbreak to 30% afterwards).
- Have a household income of \$10,000–\$20,000 (41% before the pandemic outbreak to 21% afterwards).

Respondents who identify as New Zealand European or LGBT+, and those who own their own home, experienced significantly more fraud and deception offences over the same period (see Section 3.2). As the reporting rate for fraud and deception offences is very low, this may partly explain why these groups reported fewer incidents of crime to the Police (in other words, more

³⁸ The numerator or denominator of the ratio estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.

of these types of offences will bring down the overall reporting rates for the groups that experienced them) (see Table 5-2).

Table 5-2. Percentage of fraud and deception incidents reported to the Police and percentage of victims who reported at least one incident, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19

Offence type	Incidents reported to the Police (%)			Victims who reported at least one incident to the Police (%)		
	Before COVID-19 Outbreak	After COVID-19 Outbreak	Percentage point change (%) ^a	Before COVID-19 Outbreak	After COVID-19 Outbreak	Percentage point change (%) ^a
All offences	25.7	21.5	-4.2	37.6	34.3	-3.3
Fraud and deception	10.8 ^b	7.8 ^b	-3.0	10.4 ^b	8.7 ^b	-1.7

Notes

- a. The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.
- b. The percentage is significantly different from the New Zealand average, or the relevant total, at the 95% confidence interval.

The percentage of adults who reported at least one incident of a household or personal offence to the Police decreased significantly for adults who are quite limited in their ability to afford a non-essential \$300 item, adults with a high level of life satisfaction (9 out of 10) and adults who live in a less deprived neighbourhood (NZDep2018 quintile 2).

5.3 Small changes in reasons for not reporting different offence types to the Police do not explain the overall decline in reporting

When an NZCVS respondent says they did not report an incident to the Police, they are asked to give the reason. This helps us understand why adults choose not to report crime. Despite the proportion of adults reporting incidents to the Police dropping after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not see any overall changes in their reasons for not reporting (see Table 5-3). This indicates that that declining reporting rates were not due to changes in people’s feelings about crime, or perceptions of the Police or how they will handle the incident.

Table 5-3. Percentage of incidents not reported to the Police, by reasons for not reporting, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19

Reason for not reporting the incident	Incidents not reported to the Police (%)		
	Before COVID-19 Outbreak	After COVID-19 Outbreak	Percentage point change (%)
Too trivial, no loss or damage, or not worth reporting	46.3	41.8	-4.5
Attempted crime was unsuccessful	7.0	5.6 ^a	-1.4
Did not have enough evidence to report it	13.7	11.8	-1.9
Police could not have done anything	25.0	21.3 ^a	-3.7
Police would not have bothered or interested	14.7	14.1	-0.6
Police would be too busy to deal with something like this	9.0	7.2 ^a	-1.8
Dislike or fear of police, or previous bad experience	2.8 ^a	S ^b	-
Private, personal, family or whānau matter	8.7	S ^b	-
Shame, embarrassment or further humiliation	6.5 ^a	9.1 ^a	2.6
Dealt with matter myself or ourselves	17.4	18.1 ^a	0.7
Fear of reprisals, or would make matters worse	6.9 ^a	S ^b	-
Did not want to get offender into trouble	4.8 ^a	S ^b	-
Inconvenient or too much trouble	9.1 ^a	6.4 ^a	-2.7
Happens as part of my job	3.5 ^a	2.9 ^a	-0.6
Reported to another authority (such as superiors or company security staff)	12.7	10.0 ^a	-2.7
Bank or credit card company dealt with the issue or contacted me	-	14.0	-
No particular reason, other or don't know	10.1	9.2 ^a	-0.9

Notes

- a. The numerator or denominator of the ratio-based estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.
- b. This result is suppressed, as the numerator or denominator of the ratio estimate has a relative sampling error of greater than or equal to 50%, which we consider too unreliable for general use.

Despite no significant changes in the proportions of people giving different reasons for not reporting overall crime, the proportions did decrease significantly for some reasons for not reporting fraud and deception offences. These are likely to be the result of adding a new option (bank or credit card company dealt with the issue or contacted me) to the survey after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once added, this accounted for 47% of adults' reasons for not reporting a fraud and deception offence.

5.4 Reporting to the Police decreased despite changing perceptions of crime

Section 4 explains how adults' perceptions of crime have changed since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are now less likely to view incidents as "just something that happens" and more likely to view incidents as "crime". We would expect this change to increase the rate of reporting crime to the Police, because we know from the findings of previous cycles³⁹ that people are significantly more likely to report an incident to the Police when they view that incident as "crime". However, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic the proportion of incidents viewed as "crime" that were reported to the Police has dropped from 33.5% to 25.6% (see Table 5-4). In contrast, there has been little change in the rate of reporting to the Police incidents that people view as "wrong, but not a crime" or "just something that happens". Because this decrease in reporting is primarily driven by highly victimised adults reporting a smaller proportion of offences in Cycle 5 (see Section 5.1 above), a shift in perceptions may not increase reporting because this group is already reporting some but not all the offences, they experience⁴⁰.

Table 5-4. Percentage of incidents reported to the Police, by perceptions of the incident, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19

Perception of the incident	Incidents reported to the Police (%)		
	Before COVID-19 Outbreak	After COVID-19 Outbreak	Percentage point change (%) ^a
New Zealand average	25.7	21.5	-4.2
Viewed as a crime	33.5 ^b	25.6	-7.9
Wrong, but not a crime	13.3 ^b	13.9	0.6
Just something that happens	8.1 ^b	9.0 ^b	0.9

Notes

- The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.
- The percentage is significantly different from the New Zealand average, or the relevant total, at the 95% confidence interval.

³⁹ Reports on findings from previous cycles are available on the [Ministry of Justice website](#).

⁴⁰ For more details refer to [Key findings – Cycle 5 report: Descriptive statistics June 2023](#).

6 Changes in perceptions of safety since the COVID-19 outbreak

The Living Standards Framework 2021 includes safety as a wellbeing domain. It defines safety as: “Being safe from harm and the fear of harm and keeping oneself and others safe from harm”.⁴¹ The NZCVS asks respondents “Overall, how safe do you feel?” to help us understand their perception of safety. We measure their answers on an 11-point scale, where 0 means feeling “not at all safe” and 10 means feeling “completely safe”.⁴²

6.1 Some low-risk groups felt safer

Overall, people’s perceptions of safety did not change significantly after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 6-1).

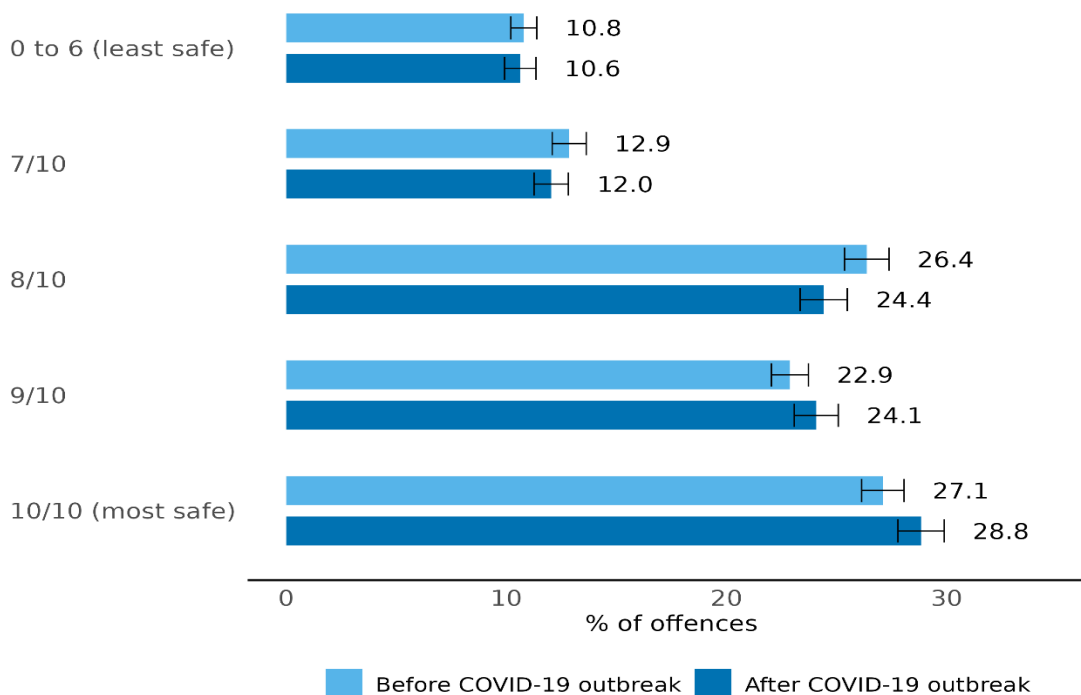


Figure 6-1. Respondents’ perceptions of safety, before and after the COVID-19 outbreak

Note

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

⁴¹ [The Treasury. 2021. *The Living Standards Framework 2021*, p. 12.](#)

⁴² We combine the seven lowest levels (0 to 6) to avoid us having to suppress results due to a small sample size.

Perception of safety is 10 out of 10 (most safe)

Some low-risk demographic groups did report feeling safer, and some of those increases are significant (see Table 6-1). There were significant increases in the proportion of adults in these groups who rated their safety as 10 out of 10 (completely safe):

- Heterosexual or straight adults.
- Older adults (aged 65+).
- New Zealand Europeans.
- Retired adults.
- One-person households.
- Adults living in large urban areas.
- Adults living in Hawke's Bay, Wellington or Southland regions.

Table 6-1. Percentage of adults who feel completely safe, by demographic group, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19

Demographic group	Rated perception of safety as 10 out of 10 (%)		
	Before COVID-19 Outbreak	After COVID-19 Outbreak	Percentage point change (%) ^a
New Zealand average	27.1	28.8	1.7
Personal factors			
Aged 65+	29.3	34.0 ^b	+4.7
Retired	31.0 ^b	35.2 ^b	+4.2
NZ European	24.6 ^b	27.2	+2.6
Heterosexual or straight	27	29.3	+2.3
Household factors			
One-person households	24.5 ^b	30.1	+5.6
Geographic factors			
Southland	30.1 ^b	58.5 ^{b d}	+28.4
Hawke's Bay	14.7 ^b	26.1 ^c	+11.4
Wellington	23.4	31.1	+7.7
Large urban areas	26.1	33.1 ^b	+7.0

Notes

- The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.
- The percentage is significantly different from the New Zealand average, or the relevant total, at the 95% confidence interval.
- The numerator or denominator of the ratio-based estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.
- The percentage has a margin of error of between 10 and 20 percentage points, or the estimate/mean has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so should be used cautiously.

Perception of safety is 9 out of 10

The proportion of Asian adults who rated their feeling of safety as 9 out of 10 increased significantly from 18% before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to 24% afterwards.

Perception of safety is 7 or 8 out of 10

The proportion of adults in some demographic groups that rated their perception of safety as 7 or 8 out of 10 decreased significantly; however, these decreases are generally mirrored by non-significant increases in their rating of safety as 9 or 10 out of 10. This means that these demographic groups report they feel safer. These groups are:

- Widowed or surviving partner.
- Adults aged 30–39.
- One-person households.
- Couple with no children and other person(s) households.
- Adults living in Canterbury, Southland and NZDep2018 (Quintile 4).
- Adults that are not limited in their ability to afford a non-essential \$300 item.
- Adults that can meet an unexpected expense of \$500.
- Adults whose life satisfaction is 8 out of 10.

Perception of safety is 0 to 6 (least safe)

Adults with a personal income of \$150,000 or more were significantly more likely to rate their feeling of safety as 0 to 6 out of 10 (least safe) following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This may reflect the significant increase in fraud and deception offences that this group has experienced since the outbreak (see also Section 3.2).

7 Summary of findings

This report examines the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reported and unreported crime in New Zealand, using data from the NZCVS.

In the two years before the pandemic, the NZCVS did not reveal any changes in victimisation or reporting behaviour. However, since the outbreak of the pandemic, we have observed these trends that reflect long-term changes in victimisation and reporting behaviour:

- A decrease in the proportion of households that were burgled.
- An increase in the proportion of people who experienced fraud and deception.
- An increase in the proportion of people who reported experiencing sexual assault during their lifetime.
- A decrease in reporting crime to the Police.
- A shift in people’s perception that interpersonal violence is “just something that happens” to something that is “crime”.

Over a similar timeframe, England and Wales have experienced the same decrease in burglary and increase in fraud and deception.⁴³ These changes are thought to be linked to behaviour changes that occurred following the pandemic (that is, more remote working and online shopping).

To our knowledge, the increase in people who report having experienced sexual assault during their lifetime has not been reported elsewhere. It also does not align with our finding that the incidence of sexual assaults over the past 12 months has not changed. However, changes in people’s perceptions that interpersonal violence offences (this includes sexual assaults) are “crimes” may help explain why people’s experience of sexual assault in a lifetime has risen. They may now be more likely to recognise past events as sexual assault. Recent changes in people’s perceptions of sexual assault have also been observed in Australia.⁴⁴ This change has been attributed to social campaigns against sexual assault, like the Me Too movement.

From our analysis, the decrease in reporting crime to the Police does not appear to be linked to any changes in respondents’ perceptions of the Police or crime. Our annual survey data shows that the proportion of offences reported to the Police decreased recently and is primarily explained by highly victimised adults reporting a smaller proportion of incidents.⁴⁵ Additionally, the decrease in the proportion of people who reported at least one offence to the Police appears to have started in Cycle 4 (2020/21) and is partly driven by an increase in fraud and deception which has a low average reporting rate. The latter trend also appears to be reversing when looking at annual results as the proportion of people reporting at least one offence increased in Cycle 5 when compared to Cycle 4.

⁴³ Kirchmaier, T, Villa-Llera, C, Agrawal and Shubhangi. 2022. *Burglaries and robberies fell during COVID – but in the poorest parts of Britain, violent crime is up*. LSE.

⁴⁴ Sweeney, L. 2021. *Grace Tame says change is a marathon effort. But Australia Talks data shows our perception of sexual assault is changing*. ABC News. 10 June.

⁴⁵ For more details refer to [Key findings – Cycle 5 report: Descriptive statistics June 2023](#).

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