

# Trends in female offending in New South Wales: 2014 to 2023

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## AIM

To examine 10-year trends in offending by females in New South Wales (NSW) between 2014 and 2023.

## METHOD

Data were extracted from the NSW Police Force's Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) for all people proceeded against by the NSW Police Force between 2014 and 2023. The number and proportion of offences committed by female and male offenders are presented. Offending trends are examined across 32 specific offence categories using the average annual percentage change in offences and the Kendall's rank order correlation test to determine statistical significance. This analysis is conducted for the entire population of female and male offenders regardless of age, then repeated for the subset of young offenders.

## RESULTS

Between 2014 and 2023 the number of females proceeded against by NSW police increased by 40%, compared to just 17% for males. The proportion of female offenders grew by around 15%, from 19% of all offenders in 2014 to 22% of all offenders in 2023. Female offenders were most commonly proceeded against for steal from retail store (12%), possess/use drugs (12%), domestic violence (DV) assault (11%), non-DV assault (7%) and breach bail conditions (7%). Much of the overall growth in female offending can be explained by increases in a small number of high-volume offence categories. These include: breach of Apprehended Violence Orders (12% increase in female offences from 2014 to 2023 versus a 7% increase in male offenders); breach bail conditions (12% vs. 8%); DV assault (8% vs. 2%); and non-DV assault (4% vs. 1%). The average annual number of female offenders (compared to males) also increased across several lower volume offences, although these contributed less to the growth in female offending overall. Most predominantly: sexual touching, sexual act and other sexual offences (13% vs. 2.5%); motor vehicle theft (12% vs. 9%); prohibited weapons offences (8% vs. 4%); break and enter non-dwelling (7% vs. stable); and trespass (6% vs. 3%). Trends and offending patterns were similar for young female offenders aged 10-17 years. One difference was the number of young female offenders grew by just 20% between 2014 and 2023 (compared to relatively stable trends for young male offenders).

## CONCLUSION

While there has been a long-term increase in the number of female offenders proceeded against by the NSW Police Force, they continue to represent a small proportion of all offenders. Further analysis utilising representative surveys may provide insight into whether trends reflect changing police practices or real increases in offending behaviours.

## KEYWORDS

Women

Offenders

Crime and policing

Children and young people

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## INTRODUCTION

Many countries, including Australia, have seen a sustained decline in crime rates over the last few decades (Weatherburn & Rahman, 2021). Alongside this general trend, a common observation across nations is that crime rates have decreased more rapidly for males than for females. This is true not only for property and drug-related crimes, but also violent crimes that were historically dominated by male offenders (Gavrilova, 2022). Consequently, although females account for a significantly smaller proportion of criminal activity than males, their relative involvement in crime is becoming more prominent. This evolving trend, often referred to as the narrowing “gender gap”, has drawn increased attention from researchers, policymakers, journalists and law enforcement agencies (Steffensmeier et al., 2023).

The long-term narrowing of the offending gender gap is well documented in New South Wales (NSW). For example, Weatherburn and Rahman (2021) examined trends in gender-specific rates of offending between 2001 and 2017. Focusing on theft, robbery and assault, they found a slower decline in female offending rates in this period relative to male offending rates. This was particularly true in the case of female assault rates, which reduced at half the rate observed for males. An earlier study by Holmes (2010) examined trends in the volume of offences committed by males and females in NSW over the 10-year period from 1999 to 2009 and found that offences committed by females increased by 15% during this period but remained stable for males. Much of this difference was attributable to a growth in females being proceeded against for breach of bail, breach of an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO), domestic violence (DV) and non-DV assault, malicious damage to property, and liquor offences. Holmes (2010) also noted that the number of young female offenders (aged 10 to 17) proceeded against by police had risen significantly by 36% in the ten years to 2009. The proportion of young offenders who were female also increased from 19% in 1999 to 23% in 2009. This finding was echoed in later work by Beaton et al. (2018), who documented a narrowing of the offending gender gap in Queensland (QLD) between 1995 and 2013, particularly amongst people aged 15 to 24 years.

Several explanations have been posited for these gender differences in long-term crime trends. The first is that young Australian males and females have become more similar in many respects over the last few decades, and that these changes may mediate their early offending behaviours. For example, Beaton et al. (2018) note that the convergence in crime rates between 1995 and 2013 may be an artefact of statewide educational reform which reduced differences in educational participation and achievement between young males and females in QLD. Alternatively, others have suggested that gender convergence in officially recorded crimes rates might reflect a change in the criminal justice response to offending by young females. Examining this possibility directly, Steffensmeier et al. (2023) investigated the gender gap for violent offending by 13–17 year olds in the United States between 2000 and 2020. Comparing data on police arrests and court appearances with self-reported offending data, the authors found that trends in recorded arrests and court referrals demonstrated greater gender convergence than more representative measures of offending, such as self-reported crime rates. Steffensmeier et al. (2023) concluded that this suggests that longer term trends reflect an increase in the likelihood of police proceeding against young females rather than a change in the underlying rate of offending by females.

## The current study

While the narrowing of the gender gap is well established in NSW, there is a dearth of research examining recent trends in female offending. This study aims to remedy this by addressing the following research questions:

1. Has there been a change in the number of female offenders proceeded against by police between 2014 and 2023?
2. Has the proportion of female offenders changed relative to male offenders?
3. What offences are females most likely to commit?
4. Has female participation in specific offences changed?
5. Has offending among young females aged 10 to 17 years changed between 2014 and 2023?

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## METHOD

### Data

To examine trends in female offending, we used an extract of data from the NSW Police Force's Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS). This extract contained police records of all criminal incidents where a person of interest (POI) was proceeded against between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2023. POIs proceeded against by way of a court attendance notice (CAN), criminal infringement notice, infringement notice, Cannabis Caution, formal caution, or Youth Justice Conference were included.<sup>1</sup> The extract also included details of the date the person was proceeded against, offence type and method of legal proceeding, as well as the POI's age and gender. Several high-volume offence categories which are heavily influenced by policing activity were excluded from the extract. This included driving offences, transport regulatory offences and breaches of COVID-19 public health directions.

For simplicity, POIs proceeded against by the NSW Police Force are referred to in the remainder of this brief as offenders. We do not consider whether the person was subsequently found guilty of the offence. Our count of POIs is also not a unique count of individuals. If a particular individual was proceeded against by police on multiple occasions, they would have multiple records in the dataset. A notable limitation of the police POI data is that it only captures offending which comes to the attention of police. As such, the volume of crime reported here will be an underestimate of the actual number of offenders. A further limitation is that some offence types are very likely to be reported to police because of their serious nature (e.g., assault and robbery), while others typically rely on the police detecting or discovering the offence (e.g., drug possession and breach bail). This means that trends in the number of POIs proceeded against for some offences could reflect changes in actual offending and/or changes in police activity.

The final dataset used in the primary analysis contained records for 2,137,550 POIs, including 437,497 female offenders and 1,695,859 male offenders.<sup>2</sup> The extract for the subgroup of young offenders (aged 10 to 17 years) contained 247,648 POI records, including 62,019 female offenders and 185,149 male offenders.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Warnings issued under the *Young Offenders Act 1997* (NSW) were excluded.

<sup>2</sup> 4,194 records were missing on POI gender. These records were excluded from the analysis.

<sup>3</sup> 480 records were missing on POI gender. These records were excluded from the subgroup analysis.

## Statistical analysis

Two analyses were conducted to determine the size and significance of trends in offending for females and males:

- 1. Average annual percentage change:** For each offence type we calculated the number of offenders in each calendar year and then calculated the average annual percentage change over the 10 years of data.
- 2. Kendall's rank-order correlation test:** Also known as Kendall's tau-b, this test was used to determine whether the number of offenders is trending upwards, downwards or is stable. The test was applied to the monthly count of offenders by offence type.

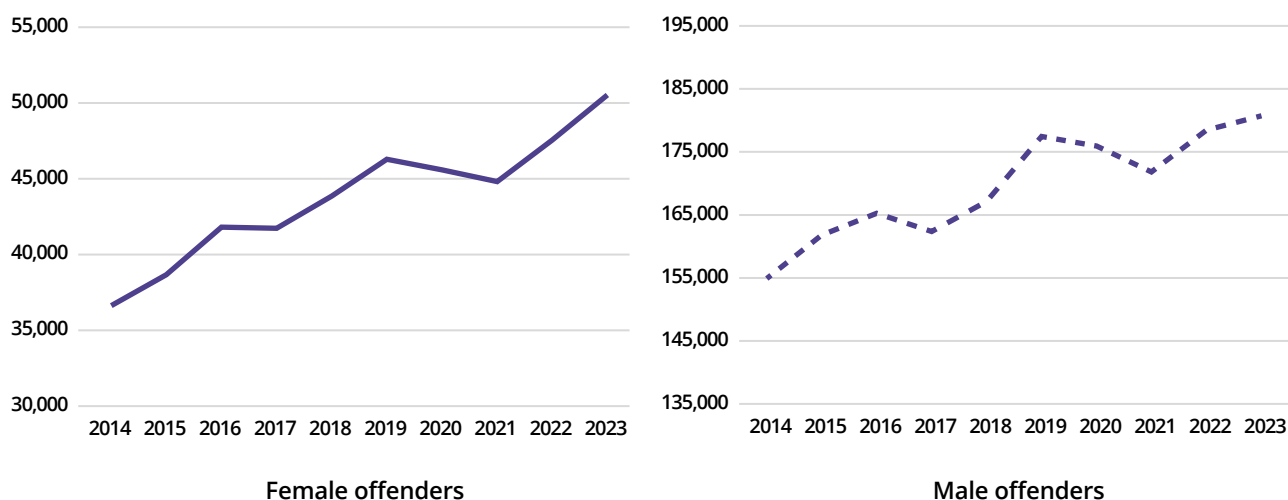
Where a statistically significant trend is found,<sup>4</sup> the average annual percentage change over the time period of interest is reported. If any of the 12-monthly totals in the series have a value of less than 20, a trend test was not conducted. This method was applied when examining changes in the total number of female and male offenders over the period 2014 to 2023, as well as trends across the 32 specific offence types and for the subgroup of young offenders aged 10-17 years.

## RESULTS

### Has there been a change in the number of female offenders between 2014 and 2023?

Figure 1 shows the number of female and male offenders in NSW in the 10 years from 2014 to 2023. The number of female offenders significantly increased from 36,635 in 2014 to 50,527 in 2023. This is equivalent to a nearly 40% increase over this period, or an average annual percentage change of 3.6%. The number of male offenders also increased over this 10-year period but at a slower rate, rising from 154,885 in 2014 to 180,716 in 2023. This represents a 17% change, or a 1.7% annual percentage change between 2014 and 2023.

Figure 1. Number of offenders by gender, NSW, 2014 to 2023

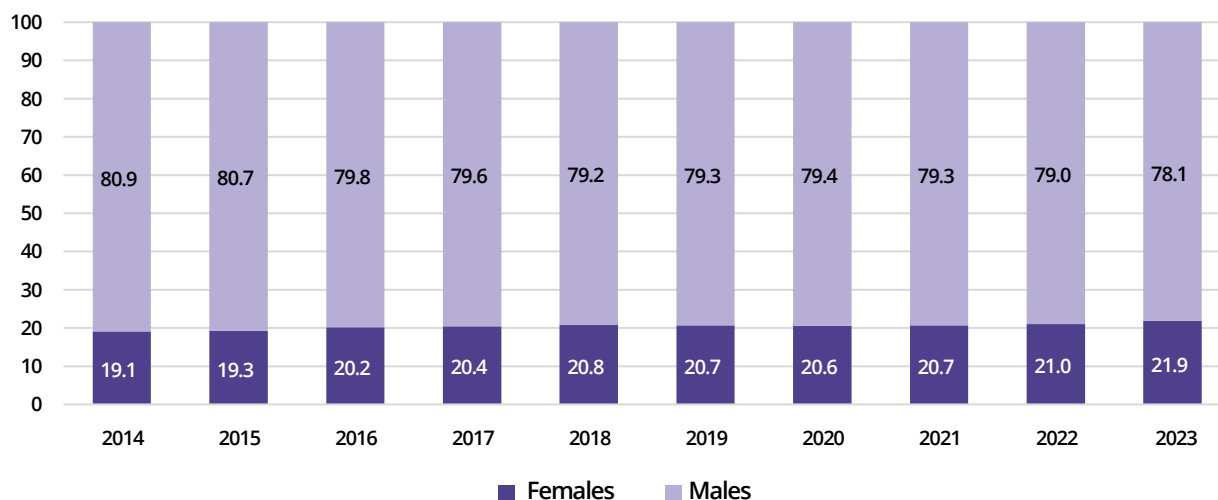


<sup>4</sup> Identified in this paper using a *p*-value threshold of .050.

## Has the proportion of female offenders changed relative to male offenders?

Figure 2 shows the proportion of female offenders relative to male offenders in the 10 years until 2023. On average, females accounted for around one-fifth of all offences committed between 2014 and 2023. While the growth in the number of female offenders has outstripped that of males, it has only contributed to a modest increase in the proportion of females among all offenders (19.1% in 2014 to 21.9% in 2023).

Figure 2. Percentage of female and male offenders, NSW, 2014 to 2023



## What offences are females most likely to commit?

We now examine the 10 most common offences involving females and males between 2014 and 2023 (Table 1).

The most common offences among females were:

- steal from retail store (52,767 females or 12.1% of all female offenders);
- possess and/or use drugs (51,980 females or 11.9% of all female offenders);
- DV assault (47,253 females or 10.8% of all female offenders);
- non-DV assault (29,372 females or 6.7% of all female offenders); and
- breach bail conditions (28,713 females or 6.6% of all female offenders).

Male offenders were most likely to be proceeded against for:

- possess and/or use drugs (209,937 males or 12.4% of all male offenders);
- DV assault (166,065 males or 9.8% of all male offenders);
- intimidation, stalking and harassment (143,743 males or 8.5% of all male offenders);
- breach AVOs (121,016 males or 7.1% of all male offenders); and
- breach bail conditions (115,791 males or 6.8% of all male offenders).

**Table 1. Top 10 offences with the highest number of female and male offenders, NSW, 2014 to 2023**

Offence	Female		Offence	Male	
	% of all female offenders	No.		% of all male offenders	No.
Steal from retail store	12.1	52,767	Possession and/or use of drugs	12.4	209,937
Possession and/or use of drugs	11.9	51,980	Domestic violence assault	9.8	166,065
Domestic violence assault	10.8	47,253	Intimidation, stalking and harassment	8.5	143,743
Non-domestic violence assault	6.7	29,372	Breach Apprehended Violence Order	7.1	121,016
Breach bail conditions	6.6	28,713	Breach bail conditions	6.8	115,791
Intimidation, stalking and harassment	6.3	27,362	Malicious damage to property	6.7	112,861
Malicious damage to property	6.0	26,456	Non-domestic violence assault	5.1	86,046
Breach Apprehended Violence Order	5.4	23,732	Steal from retail store	4.0	67,562
Fraud	5.0	22,032	Receiving or handling stolen goods	3.1	52,442
Receiving or handling stolen goods	3.6	15,940	Prohibited and regulated weapons offences	3.0	50,979

For female offenders the top 10 offences accounted for almost 75% of all offences committed by females. For male offenders the top 10 offences accounted for 66% of all offences committed by males. There are some key similarities between the types of offences committed by male and female offenders, with DV assault, drug possession and/or use and breach bail conditions all included in the top five offences for both groups. Intimidation, stalking and harassment also appeared in the top 10 offences for both female and male offenders (6.3% of all female offenders and 8.5% of all male offenders).

### Female offenders as a proportion of all offenders by offence type

Table 2 shows offences with the highest proportion of female and male offenders. The offences with the largest proportion of female offenders included: steal from retail store (43.9% of all offenders), fraud (31.2% of all offenders), assault police (30.7% of all offenders), other theft (26.7% of all offenders), steal from person (25.6% of all offenders) and non-DV assault (25.5% of all offenders). Males represented almost all offenders involved in sexual assault (97.8%) and sexual touching, sexual act and other sexual offences (97.0%). Males were also the primary offenders for: pornography offences (92.2% of all offenders), robbery with a firearm (91.4% of all offenders), break and enter non-dwelling (91.0% of all offenders), prohibited and regulated weapons offences (89.1% of all offenders) and steal from motor vehicle (88.7% of all offenders).

**Table 2. Top 10 offences with the highest proportion of female and male offenders, NSW, 2014 to 2023**

Offence	% Female	Offence	% Male
Steal from retail store	43.9	Sexual assault	97.8
Fraud	31.2	Sexual touching, sexual act and other sexual offences	97.0
Assault police	30.7	Pornography offences	92.2
Other theft	26.7	Robbery with a firearm	91.4
Steal from person	25.6	Break and enter non-dwelling	91.0
Non-domestic violence assault	25.5	Prohibited and regulated weapons offences	89.1
Steal from dwelling	24.9	Steal from motor vehicle	88.7
Receiving or handling stolen goods	23.3	Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	88.1
Domestic violence assault	22.2	Break and enter dwelling	86.7
Dealing, trafficking in drugs	21.0	Motor vehicle theft	86.1

## Has female participation in specific offences changed?

So far, we have seen that the number of female offenders has grown significantly over the decade from 2014 to 2023 and the most common offences that female offenders commit. Now we examine which offences are responsible for the growth in female offending. Table 3 shows changes in the number of female and male offenders between 2014 and 2023 for selected offences, and the average annual percentage change between years.

**Table 3. Female and male offenders for selected offences: number and trends, NSW, 2014 to 2023**

Offence	Female			Male		
	No. in 2014	No. in 2023	10-year trend & av. annual % change	No. in 2014	No. in 2023	10-year trend & av. annual % change
Sexual touching, sexual act and other sexual offences	28	83	12.8	1,629	2,031	2.5
Breach Apprehended Violence Order	1,375	3,744	11.8	8,542	15,913	7.2
Intimidation, stalking and harassment	1,635	4,409	11.7	10,355	19,137	7.1
Motor vehicle theft	176	475	11.7	1,372	2,857	8.5
Breach bail conditions	1,537	4,096	11.5	7,486	15,506	8.4
Prohibited and regulated weapons offences	363	707	7.7	4,021	5,688	3.9
Domestic violence assault	3,452	6,672	7.6	15,176	18,369	2.1
Break and enter non-dwelling	160	282	6.5	2,020	2,378	Stable
Trespass	798	1,341	5.9	3,196	4,295	3.3
Non-domestic violence assault	2,632	3,743	4.0	8,351	8,983	0.8
Malicious damage to property	2,164	3,031	3.8	11,006	11,165	Stable
Steal from dwelling	256	336	3.1	1,017	1,018	0.01^
Assault police	704	764	0.9	1,633	1,538	Stable
Break and enter dwelling	475	566	Stable	3,566	3,656	Stable
Steal from retail store	4,930	5,733	Stable	5,505	8,722	5.2
Possession and/or use of drugs	4,094	4,604	Stable	19,979	18,004	-1.1
Resist or hinder officer	1,060	937	Stable	4,598	3,678	-2.5
Dealing, trafficking in drugs	808	1,024	Stable	3,219	2,847	Stable
Robbery without a weapon	156	138	Stable	703	649	Stable
Steal from motor vehicle	151	219	Stable	1,426	1,834	Stable
Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	66	71	Stable	603	442	Stable
Receiving or handling stolen goods	1,409	1,581	Stable	4,798	5,448	1.4
Other theft	892	733	-2.2	2,371	2,010	-1.8
Steal from person	155	123	-2.5	427	347	-2.3
Fraud	2,468	1,716	-4.0	4,485	4,046	-1.1
Liquor offences	1,204	569	-8.0	6,152	2,678	-8.8
Offensive behaviour	1,516	660	-8.8	7,597	2,693	-10.9
Robbery with a firearm	15	6	nc	232	94	-9.6
Pornography offences	15	35	nc	192	411	8.8
Murder	17	21	nc	88	94	Stable
Sexual assault	21	32	nc	1,051	1,218	1.7
Prostitution offences	1	1	nc	5	2	nc

Note. nc indicates that the number of offenders recorded was too small for a reliable trend test to be performed. ^ - Kendall's tau-b found this change to be statistically significant ( $p$ -value = .049). This was also conducted over the period 2015 to 2023. In 2015 the number of male offenders with steal from dwelling was 895 which meant a 9-year average annual percentage change of 1.6%. Kendall's tau-b found this change to be statistically significant ( $p$ -value = .002).

The number of female and male offenders increased significantly for the following offences: breach AVO (11.8% each year for females and 7.2% for males), intimidation, stalking and harassment (up 11.7% each year for females and 7.1% for males), breach bail conditions (up 11.5% each year for females and 8.4% for males), DV assault (up 7.6% each year for females and 2.1% for males), trespass (up 5.9% each year for females and 3.3% for males) and non-DV assault (up 4.0% each year for females and 0.8% for males).

Significant increases were also found for females in the following low-frequency offence categories: sexual touching, sexual act and other sexual offences (up 12.8% each year), motor vehicle theft (up 11.7% each year), prohibited and regulated weapons (up 7.7% each year), break and enter non-dwelling (up 6.5% each year), steal from dwelling (up 3.1% each year) and assault police (up 0.9% each year).

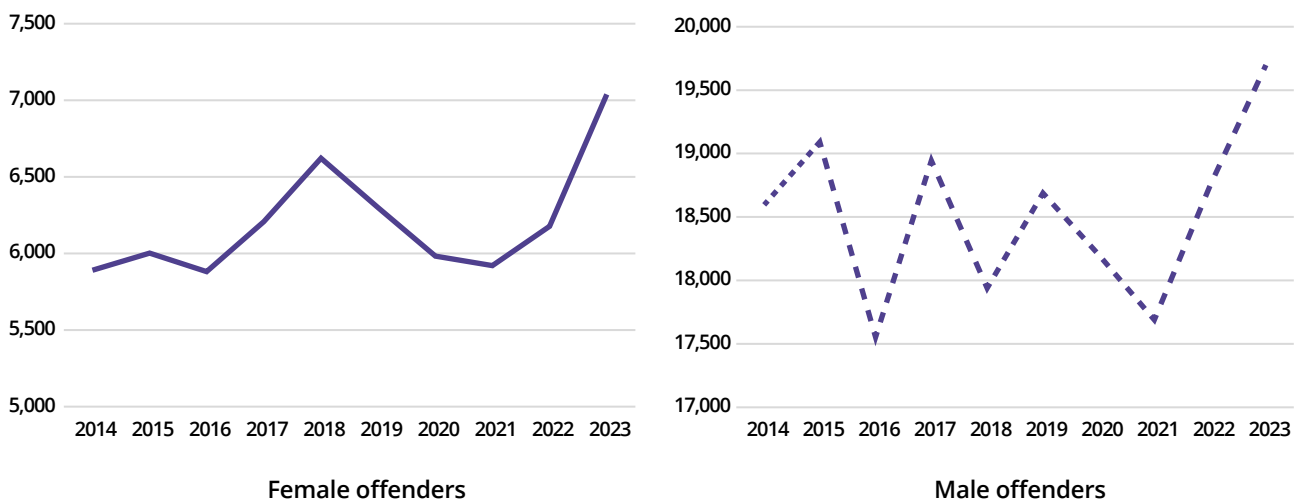
Over the period 2014 to 2023 the number of female and male offenders decreased significantly for: offensive behaviour (down 8.8% each year for females and 10.9% for males), liquor offences (down 8.0% each year for females and 8.8% for males), fraud (down 4.0% each year for females and 1.1% for males), steal from person (down 2.5% each year for females and 2.3% for males) and other theft (down 2.2% each year for females and 1.8% for males).

Offences which showed significant increases for male offenders but which were stable for female offenders included: steal from retail store (up 5.2% per year) and receiving or handling stolen goods (up 1.4% per year). There were five offences where trends could not be measured for females due to very small numbers. However, significant trends were found for males for three of these low-volume offence categories; robbery with a firearm (down 9.6% each year), pornography offences (up 8.8% each year) and sexual assault (up 1.7% each year).

### Has offending among females aged 10 to 17 years changed?

Next, we examine offending among young females. Figure 3 shows the number of female and male offenders aged 10 to 17 years (young offenders) between 2014 and 2023. The number of young female offenders significantly increased by almost 20%, rising from 5,891 in 2014 to 7,038 in 2023 (an average annual percentage change of 2.0%). There is a notable decline in the number of offences committed by young females which coincided with the COVID-19 period and the associated government response in 2020 and 2021. From 2022 onwards, the number of offences committed by young females increased again and exceeded prior yearly volumes of offending among this cohort. There was no significant upward or downward trend in the number of young male offenders between 2014 and 2023.

Figure 3. Number of offenders aged 10 to 17 years by gender, NSW, 2014 to 2023





### Has the proportion of female offenders aged 10 to 17 years changed relative to young male offenders?

Figure 4 shows the proportion of offences committed by young females in the 10 years to 2023. Females accounted for around one-quarter of offences committed by young offenders between 2014 and 2023. There was only a modest increase in the proportion of young female offenders from 2014 to 2023, rising from 24.1% to 26.3%.

Figure 4. Percentage of female and male offenders aged 10 to 17 years, NSW, 2014 to 2023



### What offences are young females aged 10 to 17 years most likely to commit?

Table 4 shows the 10 offences with the highest number of male and female young offenders between 2014 and 2023.

Table 4. Top 10 offences with the highest number of female and male offenders aged 10-17 years, NSW, 2014 to 2023

Offence	Female		Offence	Male	
	% of all female offenders	No.		% of all male offenders	No.
Non-domestic violence assault	14.7	9,123	Malicious damage to property	11.2	20,749
Steal from retail store	14.3	8,847	Breach bail conditions	10.2	18,967
Malicious damage to property	9.5	5,877	Non-domestic violence assault	7.5	13,942
Domestic violence assault	9.3	5,737	Possession and/or use of drugs	6.6	12,268
Breach bail conditions	8.4	5,209	Intimidation, stalking and harassment	6.4	11,942
Intimidation, stalking and harassment	7.6	4,730	Steal from retail store	5.8	10,775
Possession and/or use of drugs	4.6	2,878	Domestic violence assault	5.2	9,612
Breach Apprehended Violence Order	3.8	2,334	Break and enter dwelling	4.7	8,682
Trespass	3.5	2,149	Trespass	4.3	7,997
Other theft	2.0	1,228	Motor vehicle theft	3.7	6,896

The most common offences among young females were:

- non-DV assault (9,123 young females or 14.7% of all young female offenders);
- steal from retail store (8,847 young females or 14.3% of all young female offenders);
- malicious damage to property (5,877 young females or 9.5% of all young female offenders);
- DV assault (5,737 young females or 9.3% of all young female offenders);
- breach bail conditions (5,209 young females or 8.4% of all young female offenders); and
- intimidation, stalking and harassment (4,730 young females or 7.6% of all young female offenders).

Young male offenders were most likely to be proceeded against for:

- malicious damage to property (20,749 young males or 11.2% of all young male offenders);
- breach bail conditions (18,967 young males or 10.2% of all young male offenders);
- non-DV assault (13,942 young males or 7.5% of all young male offenders);
- possess and/or use drugs (12,268 young males or 6.6% of all young male offenders); and
- intimidation, stalking and harassment (11,942 young males or 6.4% of all young male offenders).

For young female offenders the top 10 offences accounted for almost 78% of all offences committed by young females. For young male offenders the top 10 offences accounted for 66% of all offences committed by young males. There are some key similarities between the types of offences committed by young female and male offenders, with non-DV assault and breach bail conditions included in the top five offences for both groups.

### Young female offenders as a proportion of all young offenders by offence type

Table 5 shows the top 10 offences with the highest proportion of young female and male offenders, respectively. The offences with the largest proportion of young female offenders were: steal from retail store (45.1% of young offenders), assault police (42.4% of young offenders), non-DV assault (39.6% of young offenders), DV assault (37.4% of young offenders), and liquor offences (32.2% of young offenders).

**Table 5. Top 10 offences with the highest proportion of female and male offenders aged 10 to 17 years, NSW, 2014 to 2023**

Offence	% Female	Offence	% Male
Steal from retail store	45.1	Sexual assault	98.2
Assault police	42.4	Sexual touching, sexual act and other sexual offences	96.0
Non-domestic violence assault	39.6	Prohibited and regulated weapons offences	90.7
Domestic violence assault	37.4	Break and enter dwelling	90.6
Liquor offences	32.2	Steal from motor vehicle	90.1
Pornography offences	30.7	Break and enter non-dwelling	89.6
Breach Apprehended Violence Order	30.6	Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	88.9
Intimidation, stalking and harassment	28.4	Motor vehicle theft	85.5
Resist or hinder officer	26.6	Criminal intent <sup>5</sup>	85.1
Other theft	24.3	Steal from dwelling	83.8

<sup>5</sup> Criminal intent was not included in the 32 specific offences whose 10-year trend were measured, as offending volumes were low amongst young offenders. For example, in 2023, only 57 offences were recorded amongst young female offenders.

Almost all young offenders proceeded against for sexual assault (98.2%) and sexual touching, sexual act and other sexual offences (96.0%) were male. Young males were also the main offenders for: prohibited and regulated weapons offences (90.7% of young offenders), break and enter dwelling (90.6% of young offenders) offences and steal from motor vehicle offences (90.1% of all offenders).

### **Has young female participation in specific offences changed?**

Table 6 shows changes in the number of young female and male offenders between 2014 and 2023 for selected offences, and the average annual percentage change between years. The number of young female and male offenders increased significantly for the following higher frequency offences: intimidation stalking and harassment (up 10.2% each year for young females and 6.8% for young males), breach AVO (up 8.5% each year for females and 3.1% for males), non-DV assault (up 6.2% each year for young females and 2.4% for young males), breach bail conditions (up 5.1% each year for young females and 4.2% for young males) and DV assault (up 5.0% each year for young females and 1.5% for young males). Significant increases were also found in these lower frequency offences: motor vehicle theft (up 14.8% each year for young females and 11.5% for young males)<sup>6</sup> and prohibited and regulated weapons offences (up 8.8% each year for young females and 5.5% for young males). For each of these offences the magnitude of the average annual increase was greater for young females.

There were significant declines in the frequency of the following offences for both young females and males: liquor offences (down 24.3% each year for young females and 13.7% for young males), offensive behaviour (down 10.2% each year for young females and 11.1% for young males), resist or hinder officer (down 6.7% each year for young females and 6.3% for young males), other theft (down 6.5% each year for young females and 7.1% for young males), steal from retail store (down 4.5% each year for young females and 0.5% for young males) and possession and/or use of drugs (down 2.1% each year for young females and 5.3% for young males). There were also significant declines in steal from dwelling (down 4.9% each year for young females and 4.7% for young males) and receiving or handling stolen goods (down 1.2% each year for young females and 3.8% for young males), but the volume of these offences was lower than other crime categories.

Ten-year trends differed for female and male offenders for a small number of offence types. Among young female offenders the trend was stable for trespass, malicious damage to property, steal from person and fraud offences. Among young male offenders the trend was significantly decreasing for trespass, malicious damage to property and steal from person offences but significantly increasing for fraud.

<sup>6</sup> This aligns with findings from Cook & Fitzgerald (2024), who identify large increases in the number of young people proceeded against for motor vehicle theft between 2019 and 2023. In this period, rates of motor vehicle theft in regional NSW increased by 165% for young males and 317% for young females.

**Table 6. Female and male offenders aged 10 to 17 years for selected offences: number and trends, NSW, 2014 to 2023**

Offence	Female			Male		
	No. in 2014	No. in 2023	10-year trend & av. annual % change	No. in 2014	No. in 2023	10-year trend & av. annual % change
Motor vehicle theft	69	239	14.8	469	1,251	11.5
Intimidation, stalking and harassment	305	734	10.2	872	1,571	6.8
Prohibited and regulated weapons offences	28	58	8.8	315	510	5.5
Breach Apprehended Violence Order	159	330	8.5	440	578	3.1
Non-domestic violence assault	778	1,338	6.2	1,286	1,598	2.4
Breach bail conditions	408	641	5.1	1,578	2,293	4.2
Domestic violence assault	486	752	5.0	930	1,062	1.5
Steal from motor vehicle	37	60	Stable	441	461	Stable
Break and enter non-dwelling	80	102	Stable	746	888	Stable
Trespass	180	208	Stable	812	771	-0.6
Malicious damage to property	582	604	Stable	2,547	1,836	-3.6
Assault police	141	121	Stable	157	158	Stable
Break and enter dwelling	95	117	Stable	998	1,146	Stable
Steal from person	54	35	Stable	132	72	-6.5
Robbery without a weapon	76	82	Stable	270	295	Stable
Fraud	130	74	Stable	262	403	4.9
Receiving or handling stolen goods	113	101	-1.2	513	363	-3.8
Possession and/or use of drugs	249	205	-2.1	1,345	821	-5.3
Steal from retail store	1,069	709	-4.5	1,093	1,043	-0.5
Steal from dwelling	44	28	-4.9	218	141	-4.7
Other theft	160	87	-6.5	489	253	-7.1
Resist or hinder officer	157	84	-6.7	429	239	-6.3
Offensive behaviour	139	53	-10.2	346	120	-11.1
Liquor offences	147	12	-24.3	309	82	-13.7
Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	15	20	nc	156	215	3.6
Pornography offences	9	29	nc	21	53	10.8
Dealing, trafficking in drugs	19	9	nc	77	59	Stable
Sexual touching, sexual act and other sexual offences	2	16	nc	143	122	Stable
Sexual assault	1	4	nc	156	137	Stable
Robbery with a firearm	1	0	nc	17	23	nc
Murder	0	2	nc	2	6	nc
Prostitution offences	0	0	nc	0	0	nc

Note. nc indicates that the number of offenders recorded was too small for a reliable trend test to be performed.

## SUMMARY

Female offending remains a small, but growing, proportion of total police recorded crime in NSW (22% in 2023 up from 19% in 2014). Between 2014 and 2023, the number of female offenders rose by 40% in NSW. This is significantly faster than the growth in the number of male offenders (40% vs. 17%). Although the volume of offences committed by female offenders remains substantially lower than male offenders overall, the faster growth rate among females suggests an important long-term shift in offending patterns. With consideration to offending volumes, the key offences driving the increase in female offending include DV and non-DV assault, breach of bail conditions and AVOs, and intimidation, stalking and harassment. These offences are traditionally associated with male offenders but appear to be becoming more prevalent among women. These results are consistent with those observed by Holmes (2010), who considered trends in female offending in NSW between 1999 and 2009, and suggest a continuation of a longer-term convergence between male and female offending rates.

Similar to trends identified by Holmes (2010) in NSW and Beaton et al. (2018) in QLD, we found that the proportion of female offenders was higher amongst young offenders. Female offenders aged 10 to 17 years represented around one quarter of all young offenders in NSW between 2014 and 2023, while for all offenders it was one fifth. Despite this similarity, both Holmes (2010) and Beaton et al. (2018) observed that the convergence between male and female offending was quicker amongst young offenders. In our study, however, we found that the number of young female offenders grew by just 20% between 2014 and 2023 (compared to relatively stable trends for young male offenders). While this is significantly slower than the 40% growth rate observed in the wider population of female offenders, key offences driving the growth in female offenders were similar for both groups. It is possible that this difference in results reflects methodological differences between studies. For instance, Beaton et al. (2018) focus on a different Australian state (QLD vs. NSW) and slightly older offenders (15–24 year olds vs. 10–17 year olds). Both Beaton et al. (2018) and Holmes (2010) also focus on a much earlier time period (1995 to 2013 and 1999 to 2009, respectively). Alternatively, Beaton et al. (2018) suggest that the faster convergence observed amongst young people in their study may be an artefact of a 2006 statewide educational reform in QLD which disproportionately improved the social wellbeing of young males.

Though we observe large increases in the number of female offenders committing select offence types, this study faces two considerable limitations inherent in using police recorded data to measure crime volumes. The first is that not all crime is reported to or detected by police. As such, the data reported in our study is likely an underestimate of the actual level of criminal activity in NSW over the period examined. The second is that any recorded change in specific offence categories may simply reflect variations over time in how police identify, pursue, and proceed against offenders. Considering the high-volume offence types that are driving the growth in female offending (namely DV assault, breach AVO, intimidation, stalking and harassment and breach bail), it is possible that much of the increase is due to police responding differently to DV offences. Police in NSW have been proactively targeting DV over the last 10 years and the legal action rates for DV have been rising. For example, between 2007 and 2016 the 90-day legal action rate for DV assault increased from 58% to 65% (Holmes & Fitzgerald, 2017).<sup>7</sup> Outside of these changes in policing, there is a concerning upward trend in other serious, though lower volume, offence categories (e.g., motor vehicle theft, trespass, break and enter non-dwelling). Since these offence types are more often reported to police,<sup>8</sup> these trends likely reflect “real” increases in criminal behaviour. In our study, we note that this has been particularly prominent amongst young females. This is consistent with recent work by Cook and Fitzgerald (2024) who found that similar offence categories increased throughout NSW after the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the magnitude of these increases was greater in regional NSW compared with Greater Sydney.

<sup>7</sup> An incident has a legal action when at least one person of interest has been proceeded against via a Court Attendance Notice (CAN), a fine (Criminal Infringement Notices) or a formal juvenile diversion. The legal action rate measures the proportion of incidents where a legal action occurred within 90 days of the incident being reported.

<sup>8</sup> These property crimes are more often reported because of their serious nature but also because victims typically require a police report to submit a claim to their insurance company.

Additional work comparing trends from this study with other data sources, such as large representative surveys, is needed to understand whether the growing number of female offenders is reflective of changing policing practices or underlying rates of offending. If reflective of underlying offending rates, the faster growth of female offending across multiple crime categories may signal a need for gender-specific crime prevention strategies. Further research is necessary to understand the drivers of female offending, and whether current interventions, which have been primarily developed to respond to male offending, are effective for female offenders.

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