

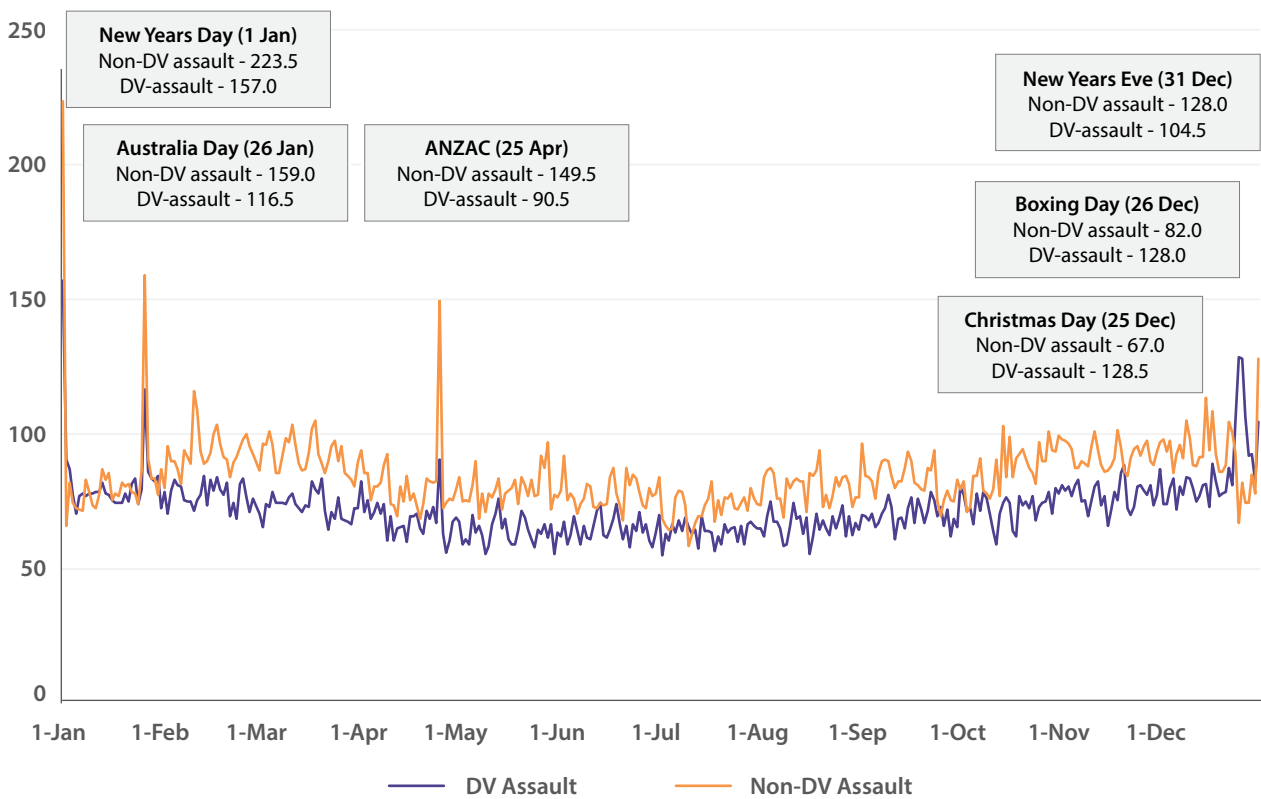
How much does crime spike over the holidays? The relationship between public holidays and assault

Nicholas Chan and Alana Cook

It is well recognised that both domestic and non-domestic violence vary over the course of the year often rising in summer and spiking during holiday periods and with other key events. This paper shows the daily number of domestic violence (DV) and non-DV assaults recorded by the NSW Police Force on each date of the year to observe the extent to which violence increases on public holidays and other significant dates¹.

Figure 1 shows the median daily number of criminal incidents of assault recorded by police from the years 2010 to 2023. To minimise the impact of abnormal crime patterns during the COVID pandemic, the chart excludes the years 2020 and 2021. The chart shows that across the year, there are clear peaks on several dates. The largest spike for both DV assault and non-DV assault occurs on New Year's Day (1 January). Obvious spikes in assault also occur on Australia Day (January 26), ANZAC Day (April 25), New Year's Eve (31 December), Christmas Day (December 25) and Boxing Day (December 26).

Figure 1. Daily median number of assaults recorded by the NSW Police



¹ The association between assault and key sporting dates is not considered here.

KEYWORDS

- assault
- domestic and family violence
- public holidays
- crime statistics
- violence

Table 1 shows the median number of DV and non-DV assaults occurring on public holidays and other significant days of recognition such as Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. To illustrate the extent to which the number of assaults reported on these days differ from what we might expect relative to the rest of the year, we have also included the daily median over the 12 years as a point of comparison. Violence is more frequent on the weekend, so the table also shows the median number of assaults recorded on weekend days.

For each of the fixed date public holidays and days of recognition, the median number of assault incidents recorded by NSW Police is generally higher the daily median.

Table 1. Median number of daily incidents of DV and non-DV assault recorded by the NSW Police on selected dates

Day	DV assault		Non-DV assault	
	Median number of incidents	Comparison to daily median	Median number of incidents	Comparison to daily median
Daily median	72.0	0%	84.0	0%
Weekend daily median	92.0	+ 28%	108.0	+ 29%
New Year's Eve	104.5	+ 45%	128.0	+ 52%
New Year's Day	157.0	+ 118%	223.5	+ 166%
Australia Day	116.5	+ 62%	159.0	+ 89%
Good Friday	77.0	+ 7%	84.0	0%
Easter Saturday	81.0	+ 13%	99.5	+ 18%
Easter Sunday	104.0	+ 44%	115.0	+ 37%
Easter Monday	90.5	+ 26%	71.5	-15%
ANZAC Day	90.5	+ 26%	149.5	+ 78%
King's Birthday	82.0	+ 14%	61.0	-27%
Labour Day	90.0	+ 25%	76.5	-9%
Christmas Eve	104.5	+ 45%	93.0	+ 11%
Christmas Day	128.5	+ 78%	67.0	-20%
Boxing Day	128.0	+ 78%	82.0	-2%

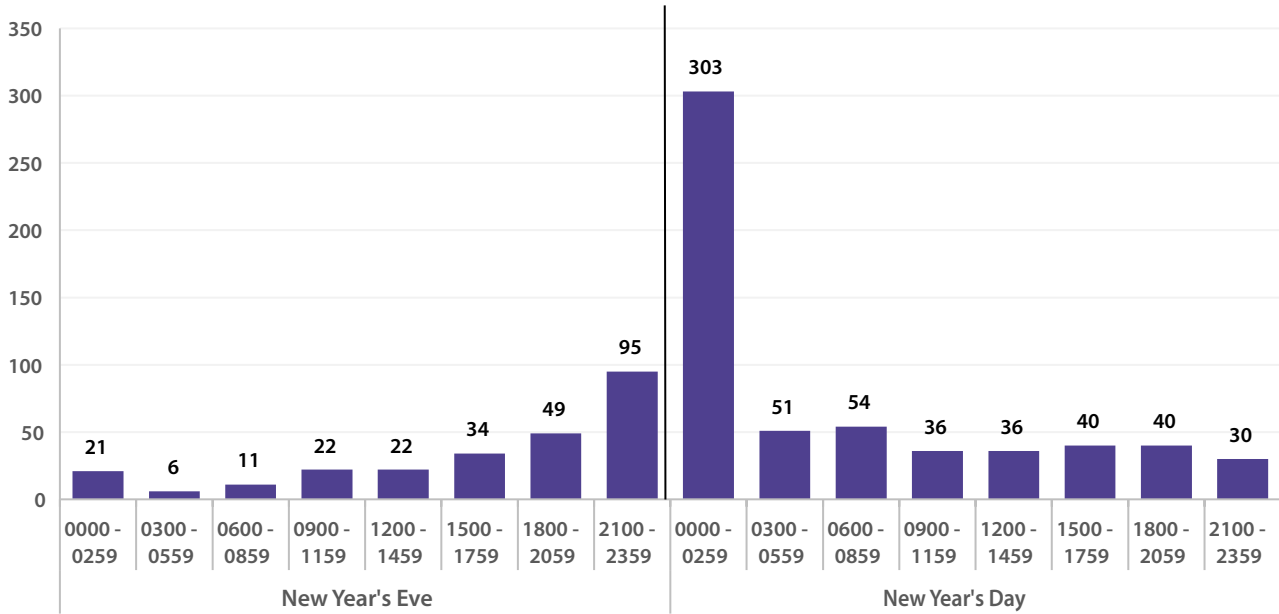
Of the significant dates considered, five holiday periods have particularly high assault volumes:

- **New Year's Eve and New Year's Day**

Both domestic violence (DV) and non-DV assault peak on New Year's Day, with more assaults of both types occurring on this day than on any other day of the year. The median number of non-DV assaults on this day is 224, which is 166 per cent higher than the daily median (84 incidents). New Year's Day is also the most prevalent day for DV assault with a median of 157 incidents; more than double (118% higher) the daily median of 72 incidents. The New Year's Day assault spike is larger for non-DV assault than for DV assault (166% higher for non-DV assault versus 118% for DV assault). The same patterns are true for New Year's Eve although the volumes are lower. New Year's Eve sees 45% more DV assaults and 52% more non-DV assaults than a typical day, also demonstrating a more pronounced spike in non-domestic assaults.

Figure 2 shows the time of day that assaults occur on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. The peak time is the first three hours of New Year's Day from 12am to 3am, followed by 9pm to 12am on New Year's Eve. This shows that the high volume of assaults on New Year's Day is very much related with extended New Year's Eve revelry.

Figure 2. Median number of assaults for three-hour time periods, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, 2019/20 to 2023/24



- **Australia Day**

Australia Day has the second highest rate of non-DV assault of any date. The Australia Day median of 159 incidents is 89 per cent higher than the typical daily median. DV assaults also spike on this day, with a median of 117 incidents which is 62 per cent higher than the typical daily median. As we saw with New Year's Day and New Year's Eve, the spike in non-domestic assaults on Australia day is larger than the spike for DV assaults (89% higher than a typical day versus 62% higher respectively)

- **ANZAC Day**

ANZAC Day regularly sees a notable spike in non-DV assaults, with 78% more incidents recorded on this day than on a typical day. DV assault also shows a modest spike on Anzac Day (up 26% compared with a typical day). However for DV assault this places Anzac Day in line with a typical weekend day as domestic violence is generally 28% higher on the weekend compared to a weekday.

- **Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day**

Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day all show high levels of recorded DV assault. The median number of recorded DV assault incidents on Christmas Day (129 incidents) and Boxing Day (128 incidents) make them the second and third highest days of the year behind New Year's Day. On Christmas Day and Boxing Day, DV assault is 78% higher than on a typical day. On Christmas Eve DV assault is 45% higher than on a typical day.

By contrast, Christmas Day sees almost the lowest volume of non-DV assault of any day in the year. The median number of non-DV assault incidents recorded on Christmas Day is 20% below a typical day (the median number of non-DV assault incidents is 67 on Christmas Day compared to 84 incidents on a typical day). Non-domestic assault on Boxing Day is slightly higher than Christmas Day, but still very much in line with the number of non-DV assaults expected on a typical day. After Christmas, non-DV assault remains low leading up to New Year's Eve when it spikes sharply as discussed.

Conclusion

We have seen that assaults recorded by NSW Police spike dramatically on certain days of the year in line with key public holidays. The day of the year with the highest number of both DV assaults and non-DV assaults is New Year's Day, with violence most likely to occur in the early hours from midnight to 3am. For domestic violence related assault, the next most risky days are Christmas Day and Boxing Day. For non-DV assault the next most risky days are Australia Day and Anzac Day.

Some of the factors that contribute to the high rates of assault on these holidays include:

- **Alcohol consumption:** For many these holidays are associated with increased alcohol consumption which, for some, leads to an increase in aggressive behaviour.
- **Social gatherings and crowded environments:** Family gatherings, social occasions and public events are common features of these holidays. Any event that brings people together increases the opportunity for conflict by providing situations where tensions and arguments can rise through personal interactions.
- **Emotional stress and expectations:** While holidays like Christmas and New Years are times for celebration, they can also create an environment with heightened stress levels due family dynamics and financial strain (among other things).