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CRIME IN THE WESTERN SUBURBS

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The N.S.W. Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has received numerous enquiries concerning crime in the western suburbs of Sydney. This area is commonly represented in the media as having a very high rate of crime.

The purpose of this bulletin is to summarize available statistical information about crime in the western suburbs, and hence to assess the accuracy of this image.

WHICH ARE THE WESTERN SUBURBS?

There appears to be no general consensus on exactly which suburbs of Sydney are "western".

The Australian Bureau of Statistics includes the following areas in the Western Sydney Subdivision: Auburn, Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Colo, Fairfield, Holroyd, Parramatta, Penrith and Windsor. The South Western Sydney Subdivision consists of Camden, Campbelltown, Liverpool and Wollondilly. As these two subdivisions appear to include most suburbs which are usually described as the "western suburbs", and omit most of those which are not, they are considered to be the "western suburbs" for the purpose of this bulletin. Using this standard classification avoids the problem which occurs when only those western localities perceived as disadvantaged are classified as "western suburbs"; they are then shown to be "at risk" in a classic example of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

MEASURE OF CRIME

Two measures of crime are used in this bulletin: accepted reports to the police of offences occurring in the western suburbs (but not necessarily committed by people living there), and Bureau of Crime Statistics figures on offences proven in court and committed by adults living in the western suburbs (but whose offences may have taken place elsewhere).

The police figures are the best available measure of the amount of crime occurring in the western suburbs ie how "dangerous" or otherwise the area is to live in. The Bureau court figures are the best indicator of the official "criminality" of its residents.

Unfortunately, the police collect crime reports by police district, for which corresponding population information is unavailable. Crime rates have therefore been calculated by matching police districts with their approximate local government areas, for which population data are available. The resulting rates are estimates only, and must be interpreted with caution.

OFFENCES PROVEN IN COURT

Table 1 shows the drink/drive, drug and other offences heard in courts of petty sessions and in higher courts which were proven against adults living in the western suburbs in 1979. Juvenile convictions are omitted, as they are collected by financial rather than calendar year and thus would not be comparable with the adult figures.

The rate of conviction per 100,000 population of western suburbs residents was only marginally higher than that of the Sydney and N.S.W. populations. For both drug and drink/drive offences the western suburbs rate was actually lower than that of N.S.W.; for drug offences, it was also below that of Sydney.

Some areas typically characterized as "crime-ridden western suburbs" in the media - notably Campbelltown, Parramatta and Penrith - had conviction rates lower than those of Sydney, or NSW, or both. The conviction rates for other western localities were among the lowest in the state. Baulkham Hills' rate of 536 per 100,000 and the Blue Mountains' of 698 compare favourably with that of Mosman (726), for example. The western suburbs with the highest

TABLE 1. ADULT PROVEN OFFENCES : NUMBER AND RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION

	Drugs		Drink/Drive		General Petty Sessions		Higher Court		Total	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate
Auburn	32	66	165	341	320	661	32	66	549	1134
Baulkham Hills	56	63	163	183	224	252	33	37	476	536
Blacktown	183	102	779	434	1523	849	156	87	2641	1473
Blue Mountains	28	55	126	246	179	350	24	47	357	698
Camden	14	84	48	287	88	527	9	54	159	952
Campbelltown	28	36	268	344	483	619	37	47	816	1046
Colo	5	39	54	420	59	459	1	8	119	926
Fairfield	93	77	448	371	1038	859	99	82	1678	1388
Holroyd	48	58	256	310	547	662	52	63	903	1093
Liverpool	97	101	422	440	916	955	101	105	1536	1601
Parramatta	118	88	375	279	806	600	101	75	1400	1042
Penrith	72	77	354	377	570	606	58	62	1054	1121
Windsor	6	30	91	449	96	474	16	79	209	1032
Wollondilly	16	95	46	273	70	415	8	47	140	831
Total Western Suburbs	796	77	3595	346	6919	669	727	70	12037	1157
Total Sydney	2954	93	9573	300	20348	637	1980	62	34855	1092
Total N.S.W.	4260	84	18270	360	32602	642	3170	62	58302	1148

conviction rates were Liverpool, Fairfield and Blacktown which each had approximately 850-950 general Petty Sessions convictions per 100,000 residents in 1979. This may be compared with 2973 such convictions per 100,000 residents of the City of Sydney local government area.

Over half the convictions were for offences classified as "General Petty Sessions". Table 2 breaks these down into more detailed offence types. The higher western suburbs rate for these offences was primarily due to higher rates of conviction for larceny, serious driving offences (mostly dangerous driving, failure to stop after accident and driving while disqualified) and "other" offences (largely fare evasion, trespassing-related offences, resisting the police and breach of recognizance). Conviction rates for western suburbs residents for prostitution, betting and gaming and offensive behaviour were lower than those for Sydney and the State as a whole. For other offences, the rates were very similar or identical. Appendix 1 presents the conviction rates for these offences by each western suburb local government area individually.

It should be noted that none of the differences are substantial. The rates for all Petty Sessions offences, for example, indicate that the western suburbs had only 1 more person in 5,000 convicted than did NSW as a whole.

TABLE 2 - GENERAL PETTY SESSIONS PROVEN OFFENCES 1979: NUMBER AND RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION

	Western Suburbs		Sydney		N.S.W.	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate
Offences against the Person	556	53	1430	45	2654	52
Sexual Offences	16	2	50	2	86	2
Prostitution	29	3	641	20	647	13
Fraud	281	27	880	28	1400	28
Break, Enter and Steal	134	13	398	12	738	15
Larceny	2240	215	6675	209	9738	192
Unlawful Possession of Property	199	19	578	18	931	18
Intent to Commit Offence	15	1	38	1	56	1
Serious Driving Offences	1207	116	2880	90	4600	91
Betting and Gaming	132	13	771	24	972	19
Firearms and Dangerous Weapons	173	17	460	14	1131	22
Environmental Offences	49	5	110	3	189	4
Property Damage	276	27	809	25	1550	31
Vagrancy	2	0	11	0	74	1
Offensive Behaviour.	799	77	2628	82	5098	100
Other	811	78	1989	62	2749	54
TOTAL	6919	665	20,348	637	32,613	642

Fig. 1 compares trends in the rate of conviction of residents of the western suburbs and of N.S.W. for several petty sessions offences between 1974 and 1979. The myth of very high western suburbs conviction rates may stem from the situation in 1975, an atypical year in which its rate was far higher than that of N.S.W. Since 1976, however, there has been no appreciable difference between the conviction rates of western suburbs and all N.S.W. residents. Appendix 2 presents these figures broken down by local government area for the period 1974-1978 (the 1979 figures are in Table 1).

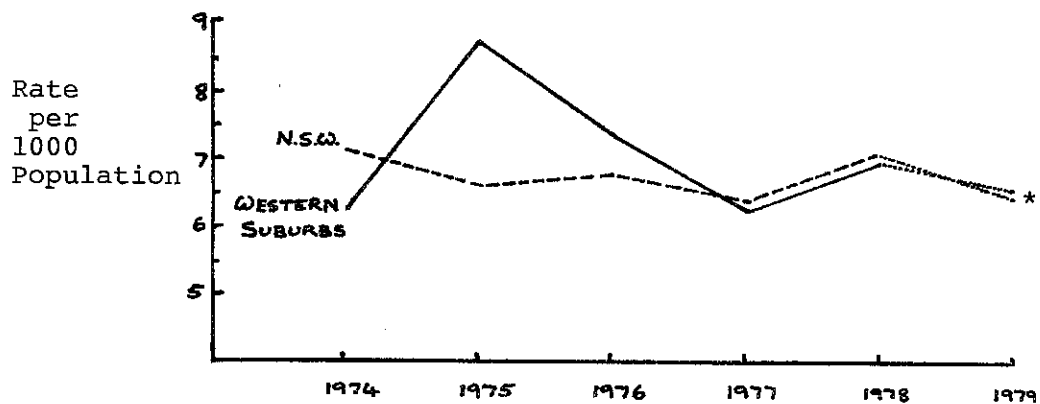


Fig. 1: Trends in Proven Offences 1974-1979

*note:indicates appeals data not included for 1979, so 1979 figures are not strictly comparable with the previous years.

CRIME REPORTS ACCEPTED BY THE POLICE

As pointed out earlier in this bulletin, crime rates calculated from police figures can only be approximations, as police districts do not exactly match any areas for which population data are available.

The police figures do, however, confirm the picture presented by the court statistics. The western suburbs are clearly not the "crime capital of N.S.W.", as so often depicted. In fact, at 3253 reported crimes per 100,000 population, their overall crime rate was lower than that of both the Sydney metropolitan area and of N.S.W., which had rates of 4156 and 3623 reports per 100,000 population respectively.

TABLE 3: ACCEPTED REPORTS OF CRIME: NUMBER AND RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION

	Western Suburbs		Sydney Metropolitan	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>Rate</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Rate</u>
Offences Against the Person	1396	134	4669	146
Steal with Violence	546	52	2964	93
Property Breaking	9534	917	38562	1208
Larceny from Property	13275	1276	51112	1601
False Pretences	1754	169	9869	309
Sexual Offences	624	60	2068	65
Miscellaneous Offences	6706	645	23482	735
TOTAL	33835	3253	132726	4156

The crime rate in the western suburbs was lower than that of the Sydney metropolitan area⁽¹⁾ for every offence category (table 3). This difference was most pronounced for false pretences and steal with violence, for which the western suburbs rates were almost half those of Sydney, and least so for offences against the person and sexual offences.

Larceny from property (commonly shoplifting) was the most common crime in the western suburbs; for Sydney as a whole, however, its rate was exceeded by property breaking, which involves forced entry to premises. The least common offence in the western suburbs (in contrast to its media-presented image as a region of muggings and robbery) was steal with violence.

CONCLUSION

In 1979 the western suburbs accounted for:

- * 32.6% of Sydney's population
- * 34.5% of offences proven against Sydney's residents
- * 25.5% of crime reported in Sydney.

In 1979 the western suburbs accounted for;

- * 24.5% of the N.S.W. population
- * 20.7% of offences proven against the inhabitants of N.S.W.
- * 18.4% of crime reported in N.S.W.

(1) Unfortunately, owing to discrepancies in offence classifications and the inclusion of different police squads, it was not possible to do a comparison with N.S.W. as a whole.

There is clearly little support in these figures for the stereotype that the western suburbs are a region characterized by a high crime rate, or that its inhabitants are considerably more "crime-prone" than are those of Sydney or N.S.W. in general.

APPENDIX 1 a : General Petty Sessions Proven Offences 1979: Numbers.

	Offences against the person	Sexual Offences	Prostitution	Fraud	Break Enter & Steal	Larceny	Unlawful Possession of property	Intent to Commit Offences	Serious Driving Offences	Betting and Gaming	Firearms and Dangerous Weapons	Environmental Offences	Property Damage	Vagrancy	Offensive Behaviour	Other	TOTAL
Auburn	17	1	1	11	3	114	7	2	54	10	13	1	12	0	40	34	320
Baulkham Hills	8	2	0	9	3	89	3	2	44	5	2	3	11	0	21	22	224
Blacktown	131	2	4	71	27	452	43	2	295	23	26	14	68	2	186	177	1523
Blue Mountains	19	0	0	4	5	64	8	0	28	0	3	0	11	0	23	14	179
Camden	7	0	0	3	2	23	5	1	24	3	5	2	2	0	7	4	88
Campbelltown	52	2	0	11	8	150	9	0	85	10	15	0	15	0	74	52	483
Colo	2	0	0	3	1	22	2	0	12	0	2	0	3	0	8	4	59
Fairfield	83	3	6	47	16	320	31	3	192	15	36	6	35	0	108	137	1038
Holroyd	34	2	0	27	15	197	16	0	84	19	15	2	26	0	65	45	547
Liverpool	82	0	14	33	13	285	38	0	159	20	16	2	36	0	88	130	916
Parramatta	52	2	4	35	25	293	20	3	100	24	16	17	33	0	85	97	806
Penrith	52	2	0	21	10	179	15	2	101	3	14	2	14	0	78	77	570
Windsor	9	0	0	5	2	26	2	0	19	0	6	0	4	0	11	12	96
Wollondilly	8	0	0	1	4	26	0	0	10	0	4	0	6	0	5	6	70
TOTAL	556	16	29	281	134	2240	199	15	1207	132	173	49	276	2	799	811	6919

APPENDIX 1b: GENERAL PETTY SESSIONS PROVEN OFFENCES 1979: RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION

	Offences against the person	Sexual Offences	Prostitution	Fraud	Break Enter and Steal	Larceny	Unlawful Possession of Property	Intent to Commit Offence	Serious Driving Offences	Betting and Gaming	Firearm and Dangerous Weapons	Environmental Offences	Property Damage	Vagrancy	Offensive Behaviour	Other	Total
Auburn	35	2	2	23	6	236	14	4	112	21	27	2	25	0	83	70	661
Baulkham Hills	9	2	0	10	3	100	3	2	50	6	2	3	12	0	24	25	252
Blacktown	73	1	2	40	15	252	24	1	164	13	14	8	38	1	104	99	849
Blue Mountains	37	0	0	8	10	125	16	0	55	0	6	0	22	0	45	27	350
Camden	42	0	0	18	12	138	30	6	144	18	30	12	12	0	42	24	527
Campbelltown	67	2	0	14	10	192	12	0	109	13	19	0	19	0	95	67	619
Colo	16	0	0	23	8	171	16	0	93	0	16	0	23	0	62	31	459
Fairfield	69	2	5	39	13	265	26	2	159	12	30	5	29	0	89	113	859
Holroyd	41	2	0	33	18	238	19	0	102	23	18	2	31	0	79	54	662
Liverpool	85	0	15	34	14	297	40	0	166	21	17	2	38	0	92	135	955
Parramatta	39	1	3	26	19	218	15	2	74	18	12	13	25	0	63	72	600
Penrith	55	2	0	22	11	190	16	2	107	3	15	2	15	0	83	82	606
Windsor	44	0	0	25	10	128	10	0	94	0	30	0	20	0	54	59	474
Wollondilly	47	0	0	6	24	154	0	0	59	0	24	0	36	0	30	36	415
TOTAL	53	2	3	27	13	215	19	1	116	13	17	5	27	0	77	78	665

APPENDIX 2: TRENDS IN GENERAL PETTY SESSIONS PROVEN OFFENCES: NUMBER AND RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION 1974-1978

	<u>1978</u>		<u>1977</u>		<u>1976</u>		<u>1975</u>		<u>1974</u>	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate
Auburn	373	771	355	732	409	842	450	921	349	711
Baulkham Hills	210	249	190	235	208	269	237	317	144	200
Blacktown	1536	884	1341	797	1713	1049	1782	1126	1257	815
Blue Mountains	189	383	150	314	106	226	148	325	76	174
Camden	68	421	62	404	57	383	77	535	69	505
Campbelltown	414	607	246	409	267	497	245	520	181	429
Colo	33	276	24	214	29	270	31	298	22	224
Fairfield	1212	1023	918	781	1125	959	1385	1182	866	743
Holroyd	510	619	445	543	458	561	629	772	429	531
Liverpool	1012	1063	995	1068	956	1043	1178	1299	783	894
Parramatta	633	472	618	460	900	669	1168	864	806	594
Penrith	604	679	564	667	557	689	678	871	564	758
Windsor	162	831	94	495	132	712	133	731	108	614
Wollondilly	69	427	42	268	61	403	67	459	52	367
Total Western Suburbs	7025	698	6044	618	6978	731	8208	878	5706	626
Total N.S.W.	35628	711	31397	633	32956	671	31730	650	35638	711