

COVID-19 pandemic and crime trends in NSW

Min-Taec Kim and Felix Leung

SUMMARY

NUMBER 147 | JUNE 2020

BACKGROUND

A global pandemic was declared on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organization in response to the spread of COVID-19. In Australia, State and Commonwealth governments imposed significant social restrictions to reduce the transmission of the virus.

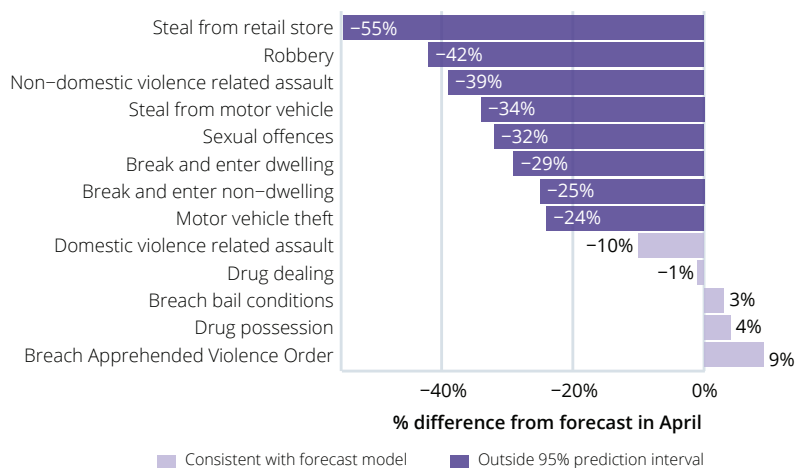
The aim of this brief is to examine changes in crime in New South Wales, Australia, in the 6-week period (15 March – 26 April, 2020) following the introduction of social distancing measures. We compare the level of crime observed during this period with the level expected based on forecast models using historical observations.

KEYWORDS

- social isolation
- social distancing
- COVID-19
- Coronavirus
- crime trends

KEY FINDINGS

Changes in number of police recorded incidents, NSW, April 2020



Examining the number of incidents in April 2020, we found that:

- Non-domestic violence related assaults were 39% lower than expected. Domestic violence related assaults were consistent with expectations.
- Sexual offences were 32% lower and robberies 42% lower than expected.
- Various property offences were lower than expected: residential break-ins (down 29%), non-residential break-ins (down 25%), vehicle theft (down 24%), stealing from a vehicle (down 34%) and retail theft (down 55%).
- Drug possession and dealing incidents remained stable in aggregate. But cocaine possession incidents were 40% lower than expected while amphetamine possession incidents were 30% higher than expected.
- Breaches of Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) and bail conditions remained stable, despite an 85% increase in AVO compliance checks and a 13% increase in bail compliance checks.

CONCLUSION

Since the start of the COVID-19 containment measures, there have been sharp falls in non-domestic related assault, sexual offences, robbery, break and enter (dwelling and non-dwelling), vehicle theft, stealing from vehicles and stealing from retail premises. It is important to note, however, that this study examines criminal incidents detected by, or reported to, police and findings may not reflect trends in unreported offences.