

Perceptions of Justice Survey Results 2008 (with 2007 comparison)

CD/09/99030

DEPARTMENT
OF JUSTICE

State Government
Victoria

Background

Since 2002, the Department of Justice has conducted a survey to measure public perceptions on various aspects of the justice system, including feelings of safety, fear of crime and perceptions of justice relating to the court system. This bulletin presents summarised results from the 2007 and 2008 surveys in three sections: feelings of safety; fear of crime; and the criminal justice system. It also provides contextual information from other sources such as Victoria Police *Crime Statistics 2007/2008* and the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2009*. For more information on the survey methodology, refer to the Glossary and Technical Notes at the end of this document.

Feelings of safety

The Perceptions of Justice survey asks people whether they feel safe at home, and in their neighbourhoods, during the day and at night, and about feelings of safety travelling on public transport during the day and at night.

Throughout 2007 and 2008, Victorians reported that they generally felt safe in their homes, both during the day and at night. People also said they felt safe in their neighbourhood during the day, but reported feeling less safe at night.

At home

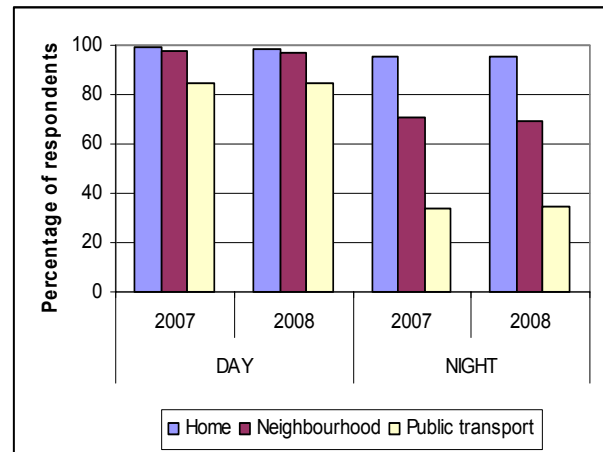
The survey results have been consistent over the past two years. In 2008, the majority of people (98.7%) reported feeling 'safe' or 'very safe' at home during the day (99.1% in 2007).

Similarly, the majority of respondents (95.3%) reported feeling 'safe' or 'very safe' at home at night (95.2% in 2007).¹

In the neighbourhood

In 2008, 97.2% of survey respondents reported feeling safe in the streets and public places in their neighbourhoods during the day (97.9% in 2007). However, fewer people (69.3%) reported feeling safe in their neighbourhoods at night (70.8% in 2007).

Table 1: *Feelings of safety in different situations, December 2007 & 2008.*



Source: POJ2 Survey results, 2007 & 2008.

On public transport

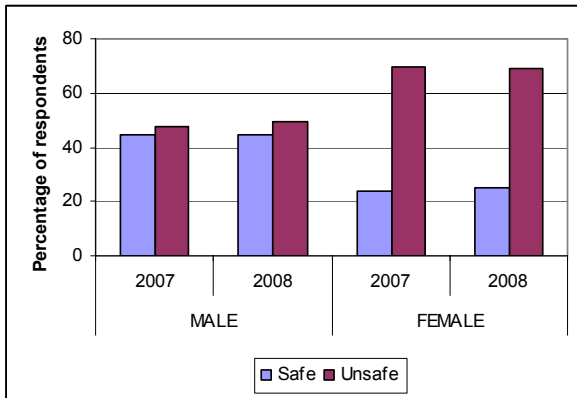
A majority of people (84.5%) surveyed in 2008, reported feeling safe on public transport during the day. This is consistent with 2007 findings where 84.7% of people reported feeling safe on public transport during the day.

However, people reported feeling less safe travelling on public transport at night, with only 34.5% in 2008 (34.0% in 2007) reporting feeling safe.

In 2008, 69.2% of women reported feeling unsafe at night when travelling on public transport (69.3% in 2007). Similarly, 49.3% of men reported feeling unsafe when travelling on public transport at night (47.9% in 2007).

¹ From this point the usage of 'safe' will also mean to include 'very safe'. The same applies to 'unsafe', which will also mean to include 'very unsafe'.

Table 2: *Feelings of safety travelling on public transport at night by gender, 2007 & 2008*



Source: POJ2 Survey results, 2007 & 2008.

According to the Department of Transport, patronage on Melbourne’s public transport network increased by 7.7% in 2007/08 due to an increase in employment, significant population growth and higher petrol prices. Passenger trips on metropolitan trains reached 201.2 million in 2007/08, a record high and an increase of 12.7% on 2006/07. This represents an overall increase of over 70% in the nine years from 1998/99 to 2007/08.²

Although there was an 8.4% increase in the number of crimes reported on and around public transport since 2006/07³, since 2000/01 overall crime on and around public transport⁴ has decreased by 20.1 per cent.⁵

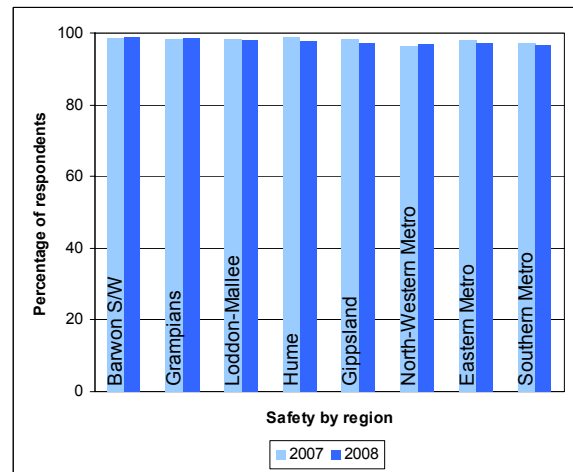
Overall feelings of safety by regions

In addition to specific questions about feelings of safety, people were asked ‘how safe do you consider yourself to be, overall, at any time, as you go about your normal activities?’ The general response for all regions across Victoria was that feelings of safety are very high.

In 2008, the Barwon South Western region reported the highest proportion of people who felt safe (98.9%), followed by the Grampians (98.8%), Loddon Mallee (97.8%), Hume and

Gippsland regions each recording 97.4%, Eastern Metropolitan region (97.3%), North Western Metropolitan region (97.0%) and Southern Metropolitan region (96.7%). These results are only slightly different to the 2007 results where the Hume region reported the highest proportion of people feeling ‘safe’, while the North Western Metropolitan region reported the lowest. (see table 3 below).

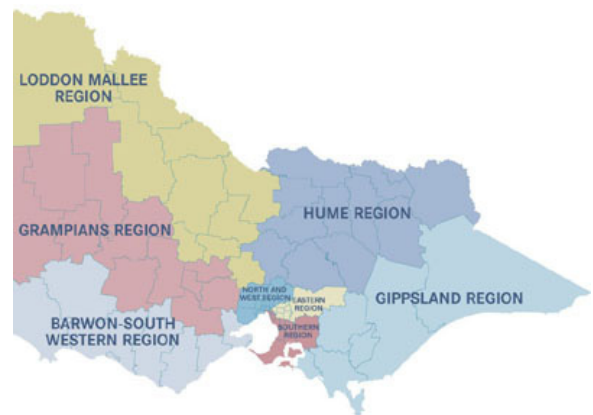
Table 3: *Overall feelings of safety by region, 2007 & 2008.*



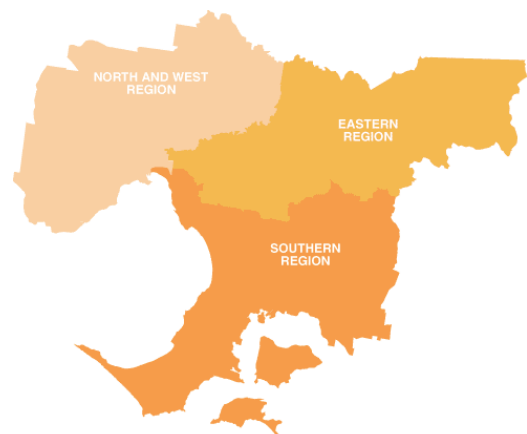
Source: POJ2 Survey results, 2007 & 2008.

Maps of rural and metropolitan regions (Source: Department of Justice)

Rural Regions



Metropolitan Regions



² Department of Transport, 2007/08 Annual Report, Department of Transport and Infrastructure, Melbourne, p51.

³ Victoria Police, Crime Management Report 2007/2008, June 2008, p.13.

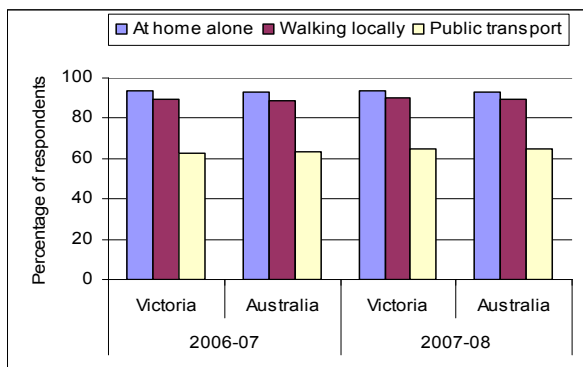
⁴ Public transport is defined by Victoria Police in its Annual Crime Statistics Reports as Train; Train Station; Railway Car Park; Tram/Tram Stop; Bus/Bus Stop; Depot/Terminal, Freight Yard, Office (PTC only); Taxi

⁵ Figure derived from Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2000/01 and 2007/08 – Offences recorded by type of location, Tables 9.1.

National comparisons

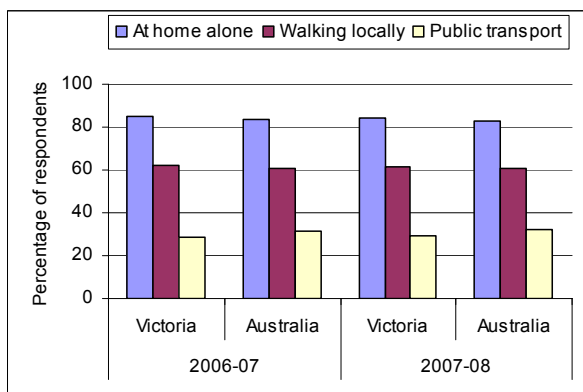
The Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services* (RoGS) also reports on feelings of safety at home; in the neighbourhood; and on public transport.⁶ The Victorian responses for these measures are compared below with the 2006/07 and 2007/08 national averages. As can be seen, Victorian responses closely mirror national averages.

Table 4: *Feelings of safety (during day), Victoria and Australia.*



Source: ROGS 2009.

Table 5: *Feelings of safety (during night), Victoria and Australia.*



Source: ROGS 2009.

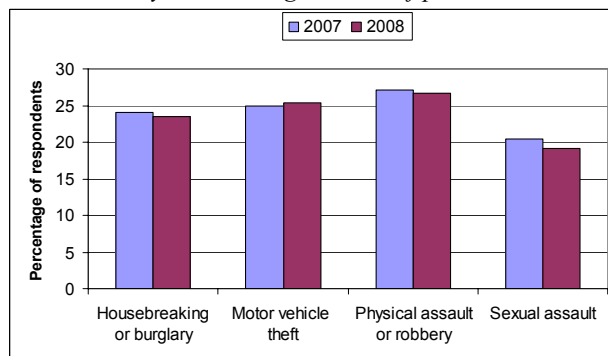
Incidence and Fear of Crime

This section outlines people's fear of becoming a victim of a specific crime, and compares these perceptions with recorded incidence of crime. The crime data has been obtained from Victoria Police *Crime Statistics 2007/2008*.

The POJ survey asked people about their fear of being a victim of a specific crime e.g. robbery and sexual assault. Fear of specific types of crime is a different concept to feelings of safety in various situations. It is possible to feel generally safe but be concerned about specific crimes.

⁶ Source: Australia New Zealand Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) (unpublished).

Table 6: *Worry about being a victim of particular crimes*



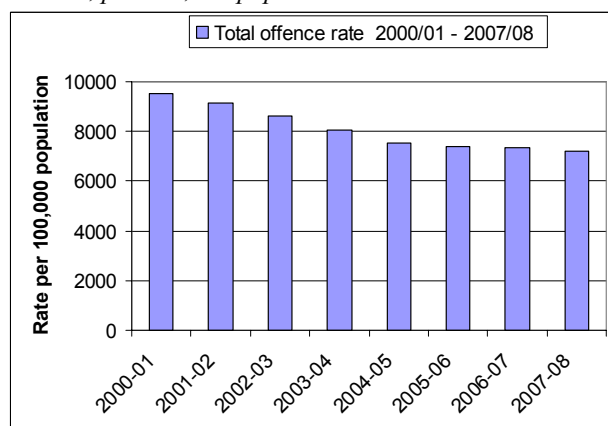
Source: POJ2 Survey results, 2007 & 2008.

As the above table indicates, slightly more people in 2008 (26.6%) and in 2007 (27.1%) said they were worried about being a victim of physical assault or robbery. For housebreaking/burglary, physical assault/robbery and sexual assault, people's level of worry had slightly reduced from the previous year, mirroring the overall reduction in recorded crime for 2007/08.

Overall incidence of crime

According to Victoria Police data, in 2007/08 there was a 1.9% reduction (per 100,000 population) in overall crime from 2006/07. Moreover, since 2000/01 the overall crime rate in Victoria has decreased by 24.5% (per 100,000 population).

Table 7: *Level of overall crime 2000/01 – 2007/08, Victoria, per 100,000 population.*

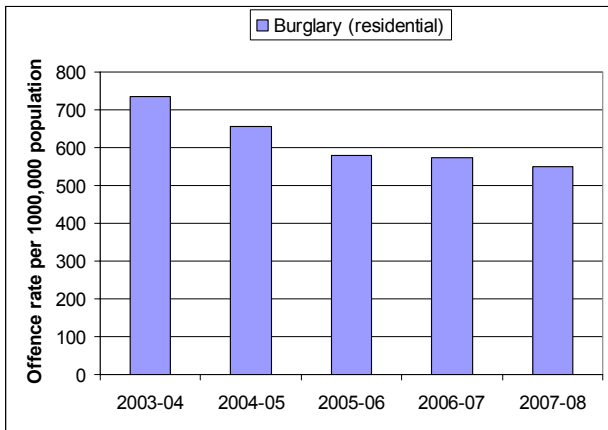


Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2007/2008

Housebreaking or burglary

The number of residential burglaries recorded decreased by 2.5%, from 29,551 in 2006/07 to 28,817 during 2007/08. Non-residential burglaries increased slightly in 2006/07 (1.0%), with 19,322 incidents recorded in 2007/08.

Table 8: Levels of burglary, Victoria 2003/04 – 2007/08, per 100,000 population.

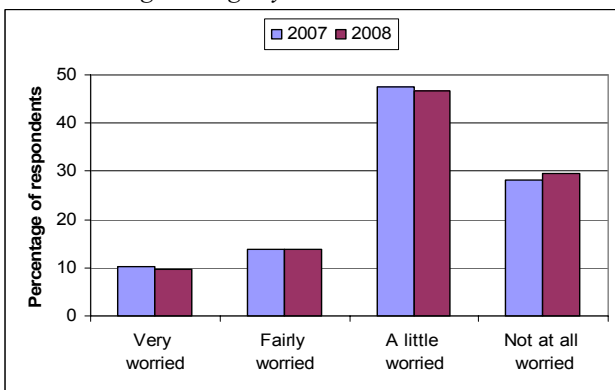


Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2007/2008

Perception

When asked ‘how worried are you about being a victim of housebreaking or burglary?’ 23.4% of respondents in 2008 said they were either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ worried (24.1% in 2007).

Table 9: How worried are you about being a victim of housebreaking or burglary?

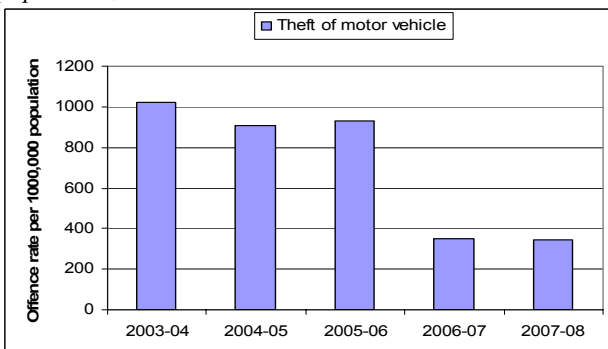


Source: POJ2 Survey results, 2007 & 2008.

Motor vehicle theft

The number of motor vehicle thefts increased marginally (0.1%) in 2007/2008, the first increase in this category since 2000/01. However, in terms of rates per 100,000 there has been a decrease of 1.5%.

Table 10: Rate of motor vehicle theft per 100,000 population, 2003/04 to 2007/08.

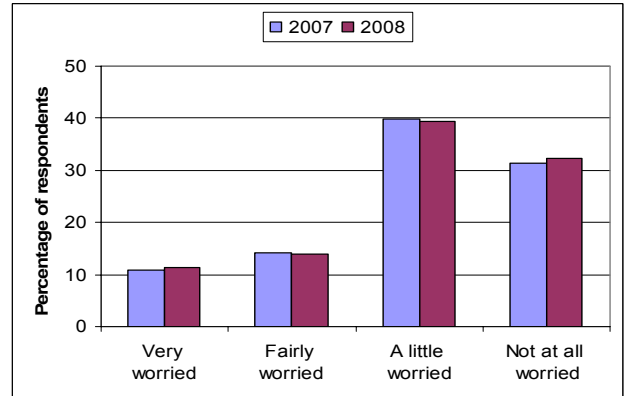


Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2007/2008

Perception

In relation to motor vehicle theft, 26.0% of people surveyed in 2008 said they were ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ worried (25.8% in 2007) about being a victim of motor vehicle theft.

Table 11: How worried are you about being a victim of motor vehicle theft?

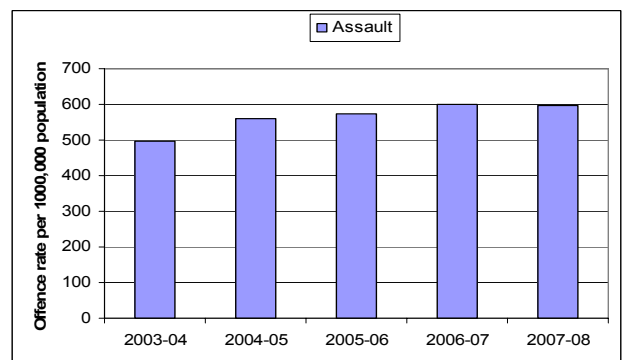


Source: POJ2 Survey results, 2007 & 2008.

Physical Assault

There was a slight increase in assaults (0.7% or 232 offences) in 2007/08. The introduction of the *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence* in August 2004 has been effective in changing the way police deal with family violence incidents. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of intervention orders sought by police. According to Victoria Police, family violence incidents now represent 24% of all assaults.

Table 12: Rate of assault per 100,000 population, 2003/04 to 2007/08.



Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2007/2008

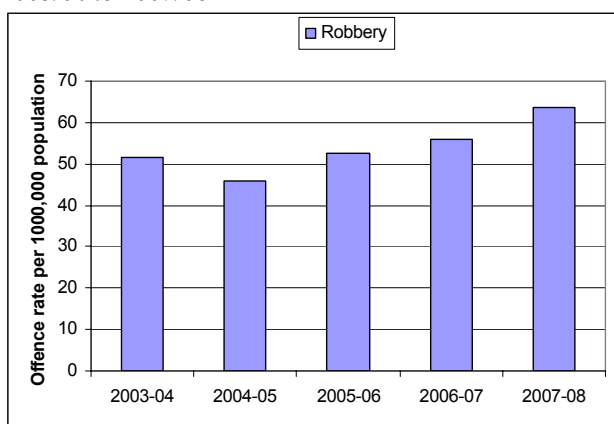
Robbery

In 2007/08, robbery offences increased by 15.7% (from 2880 incidents in 06/07 to 3332 in 07/08). In 2007/08, almost all robberies (90.1%) were committed by males (with male offenders

under the age of 18 years increasing by 46.3% from 2006/07).⁷

Robberies occurring on the street, in lanes or footpaths increased 25.8% with robberies occurring at public transport locations increasing by 24.2%.⁸ According to Victoria Police a possible reason for the increase of robberies at these locations is the increase in the number of people carrying personal electronic devices such as mobile phones and MP3 devices. However, cash remains the most recorded item of property stolen during robberies.⁹

Table 13: Rate of robbery per 100,000 population, 2003/04 to 2007/08

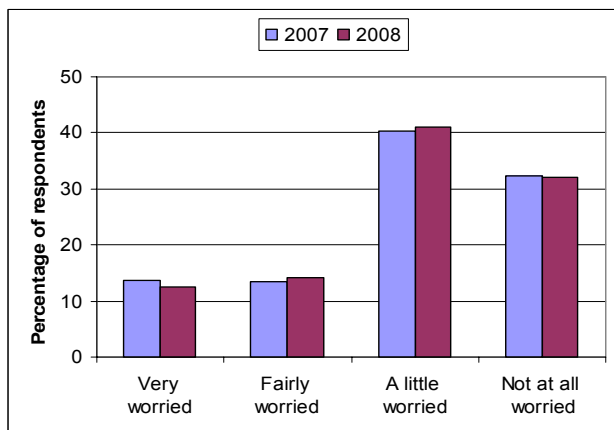


Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2007/2008

Perception

The POJ survey asked people ‘how worried are you about being a victim of physical assault or robbery?’ In 2008, 26.6% of people surveyed reported being ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ worried (27.1% in 2007).

Table 14: How worried are you about being a victim of Physical assault or robbery



Source: POJ2 Survey results, 2007 & 2008.

⁷ Victoria Police, *Crime Statistics 2007/2008*

⁸ *ibid*, p.24

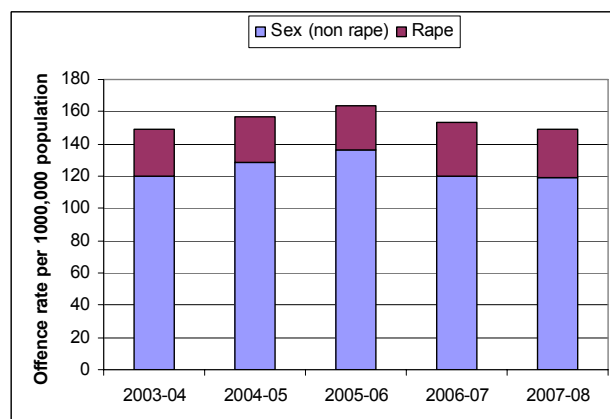
⁹ Victoria Police, *Crime Statistics 2007/2008*, Official Release.

Sexual Assault

In 2007/08, recorded rapes decreased by 8.1% from the previous twelve months. In 77.5% of all rape matters, the offender was known to the victim.

There was a slight increase (0.9%) in recorded non-rape sex offences, however, this represents a decrease of 0.7% in the overall rate of non-rape sex offences.

Table 15: Number of sexual offences (rape/non-rape), per 100,000 population, 2003/04 to 2007/08.



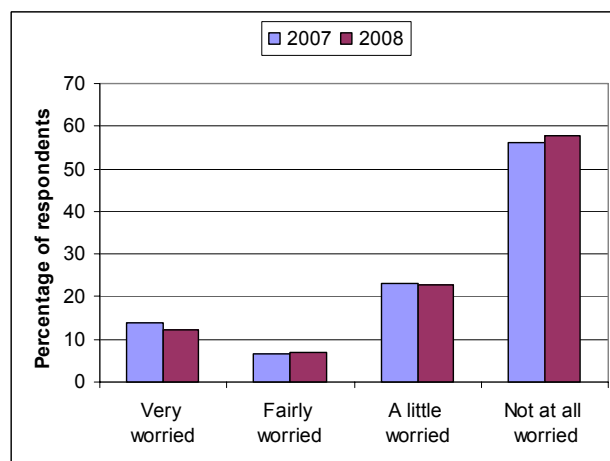
Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2007/2008

Perception

In 2008, 19.1% of respondents said they were ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ worried (20.5% in 2007) about being a victim of sexual assault.

In 2008, more women (29.8%) than men (8.0%) reported being ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ worried about being a victim of sexual assault. This is slightly less than in 2007, where 32.3% of women reported being worried about being a victim of sexual assault, compared with 8.1% of men.

Table 16: How worried are you about being a victim of sexual assault?



Source: POJ2 Survey results, 2007 & 2008.

Criminal Justice System

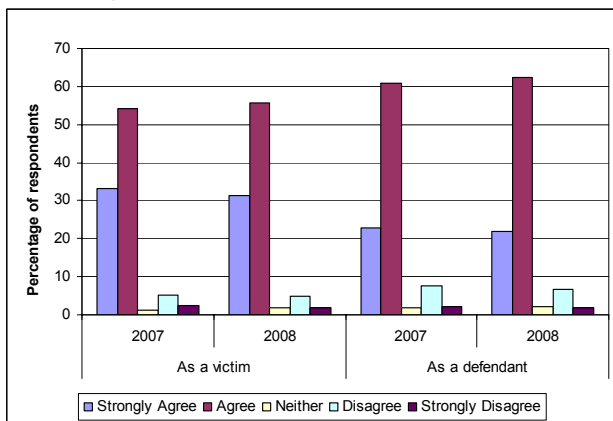
Courts

In relation to the criminal justice system, the survey asks a range of questions to gauge people's perceptions of fairness in the Victorian court system.

In 2008, when asked to imagine whether, if they had to go to court (as a victim) they thought they would be 'treated with dignity and respect', 87.1% of respondents 'agreed or strongly agreed' that they would be (87.3% in 2007).

When asked to imagine whether, if they had to go to court (as a defendant) they thought they would be 'treated with dignity and respect', 84.4% of respondents 'agreed or strongly agreed' that they would be (83.6% in 2007).

Table 17: *Perceived treatment with dignity and respect in the Courts, 2007 & 2008*



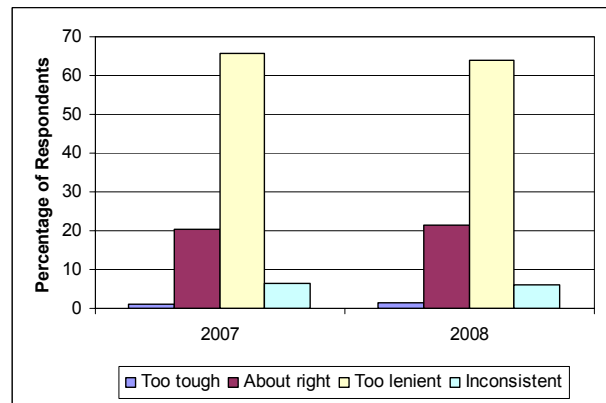
Source: POJ2 Survey results, 2007 & 2008.

Sentencing

When asked about the appropriateness of sentences handed down in criminal cases 63.9% of people in 2008 felt that sentences were too lenient (65.7% in 2007). Only 21.3% of respondents in 2008 thought sentences handed down were 'about right' (20.4% in 2007).

When asked 'what types of criminals or offenders were you mainly thinking of when you said that sentences were too lenient?', most people responded that they were thinking of murderers and sex offenders in responding to this question.

Table 18: *Perceptions on leniency in sentencing in criminal cases 2007 & 2008*



Source: POJ2 Survey results, 2007 & 2008.

It is worth noting some relevant research which provided some context in relation to these results. The Sentencing Advisory Council's (SAC) 2006 research paper "*Myths and Misconceptions: Public Opinion versus Public Judgement about Sentencing*", found that although in the abstract a significant proportion of the community thinks sentences are too lenient, people have very little accurate knowledge of the crime and criminal justice system.

The SAC report found that the mass media is the primary source of information on crime and justice issues for most people. The report goes on to say however, that when people are given accurate information on the particulars of a case, their levels of punitiveness drop dramatically, and that their sentencing preferences are actually very similar to those handed out by the courts.

POJ survey participants said their main sources of information about criminal cases were TV news/current affairs programs (64.5%) and newspapers (60.0%).

The Sentencing Advisory Council report can be found at www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au.

Glossary

Assault: where the respondent was personally attacked or threatened by someone in a way that really frightened them

Burglary: excludes thefts from garages, sheds or lock-ups, burglaries in second houses, and unsuccessful attempts. Includes cellars.

Robbery: where something is stolen (or an attempt is made) by using force or threatening force.

Civil cases: court cases which do not involve police charges and are usually disputes between people or businesses about things like insurance claims, contracts, personal injuries or neighbourhood disputes. The PoJ questionnaire excludes Family Court cases

Criminal cases: court cases involving offences such as burglary, theft, assault, robbery, or murder.

Technical notes

Participants are selected using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing method. A primary approach letter is sent to all selected households introducing the survey and providing the option to withdraw from the survey. Approximately 5,000 respondents are selected per year, with a two-week summer break, and each quarter therefore has a sample size of 1,250. The results in this document refer to the 2007 and 2008 survey data. Respondents are selected on a regional basis in line with each region's population distribution. All respondents are aged 18 years and over, and the information provided by participants remains strictly confidential. Names and other details identifying the person are not recorded or used in any way. The survey results are weighted to reflect the Australian Bureau of Statistics' estimates of age, gender, and region of residence for the Victorian population.

Some variables are not mutually exclusive; for example, when asked why they paid a fine on time, respondents may state that they paid on time both because they deserved the penalty, and also because it was the right thing to do. Therefore, percentage totals may not always sum to 100%. All figures are percentages unless specified otherwise, and are rounded to the nearest whole number. Except where specified, 'Don't know' responses have been excluded from graphs and tables.

Caution should be exercised when comparing results from different data collections, due to methodological differences (eg, sampling, counting rules etc).

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