

# Victimisation statistics: new results from the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey

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## Abstract

*The New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS) is the most comprehensive source of data on adult (aged 15 and older) victims of crime in Aotearoa New Zealand. Because only around a quarter of crime incidents are reported to the Police, the NZCVS is the only regular source of data on the true nature and volume of crime in New Zealand.*

*Since its introduction in 2018 the NZCVS has interviewed around 42,000 adult New Zealanders on their experience with crime. The survey is based on face-to-face interviews which were complemented by virtual interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic. The NZCVS combines interviewer driven topics with self-interviewing for more sensitive questions.*

*Because of the consistent methodology used by the NZCVS across all cycles, New Zealand Ministry of Justice is now able to analyse changes in the levels of crime and victimisation with higher accuracy. Annual reports usually cover topics like trends in victimisation by offence types, victimisation of particular demographic and socio-economic population groups, family and sexual violence, distribution of crime, reporting to Police and perceptions of safety. Additionally, the Ministry produces in-depth analytical reports on prioritised topics.*

*The NZCVS results provide a measure of the true level of crime and victimisation in New Zealand to guide policy and intervention design, support strategic monitoring of crime and victimisation, contribute to victims-related policy decisions and improvement of victims' support services. The NZCVS data is widely used in official statistics and international reporting including the UN's Strategic Development Goals reporting (SDG 16).*

*This paper focuses on the latest results from the NZCVS obtained from Cycle 5 (November 2021 – November 2022). It also covers survey methodology, issues related to face-to-face interviewing during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and plans for further development of the NZCVS.*

**Key words:** sample survey, victimisation, crime, data analysis, time series.

## Background

Administrative data does not provide a full picture of crime and victimisation because only a small proportion of crime incidents are reported to police. Victimisation surveys are introduced to narrow this gap in crime statistics. Victimisation surveys are unique in their approach to design and statistical analysis due to highly sensitive questions, difficulties in coding, interpretation and presentation of data.

The NZCVS is an annual, nationwide, face-to-face, random-sample survey. It involves interviewing adults aged 15 years and over, who live in a private dwelling, about their experiences of crime in New Zealand over the last 12 months. Their experience includes crime incidents reported to the Police and unreported incidents.

The main research objectives of the NZCVS are to:

- measure the extent and nature of reported and unreported crime throughout New Zealand
- understand who experiences crime and the consequences of experiencing crime
- identify which groups face higher risks of experiencing crime
- understand victims' experiences and needs
- measure crime trends in New Zealand
- provide timely and adequate information to support strategic decisions
- significantly shorten the period between collecting data and reporting findings, compared with previous victimisation surveys
- match survey data with relevant administrative records, to provide more comprehensive information for developing policies and making decisions.

The NZCVS provides the best estimate of a wide range of personal and household offences that are not captured elsewhere. However, it does not report the total amount of crime in New Zealand, because it does not cover every type of crime and does not survey the entire population. In particular, the NZCVS does not cover:

- Manslaughter and murder
- Abduction
- Crimes against children (aged 14 and under)
- Traffic offences
- "Victimless" crime, where the victim cannot be identified (such as, drug offences)
- Commercial and retail crime, bribery and corruption and crimes against businesses or public-sector agencies. This is the case even if the person being interviewed is a business owner.
- Crimes against people who do not live in a permanent private dwelling
- Crimes against people who live in an institution.

In order to deliver compelling outcomes, the NZCVS applies four mutually complementing measures of victimisation:

- 1) the number of incidents of crime in a 12 month period (incidence)
- 2) the number of offences per 100 adults or 100 households (incidence rate)
- 3) the number of adults or households who experience at least one crime (prevalence)
- 4) the percentage of adults or households who experience at least one crime (prevalence rate).

The key benefits provided by the NZCVS are:

- an increased ability to quantify the underlying level of crime
- an improved ability to monitor crime trends over time by delivering annual reports
- an ability to collect particular aspects of victimisation or types of crime and to learn about victims' experience related to the selected prioritised topic
- an improved ability to support performance monitoring for the wider Justice System
- an improved ability to analyse survey results by linking victimisation to other outcomes by bringing the NZCVS into Statistics New Zealand (Stats NZ) Integrated Data Infrastructure in order to better inform conversations and decision-making.

## Specific features of the NZCVS

The NZCVS design includes some important specific features. They include:

- Combination of two samples, main sample (about 2/3 of the total sample size) and Māori booster sample (about 1/3 of the total sample size). The purpose of the Māori booster sample is to ensure that the survey collected sufficient data from Māori, in order to produce reliable analytic results for this population group.
- Multistage selection of survey respondents: first, a random selection of primary sampling units (PSUs) which is drawn from Stats NZ's Household Survey Frame; second, a random selection of households (dwellings) within PSUs; and third, a random selection of one eligible respondent within each household.
- Mixed mode design – combination of computer assisted self-interview (CASI) for highly sensitive questions like those related to interpersonal violence, controlling behaviour and some demographic questions, and computer assisted personal interview (CAPI) for all other questions.
- Modular design which combines a core questionnaire repeated each year with minimal changes and used for monitoring changes in victimisation and trend analysis, and variable parts which allow in-depth analyses of priority topics specifically identified every year.
- Manual coding of offence types based on a free format description of incidents. The coding algorithm was developed jointly with New Zealand Police and allows allocating offence types to every incident in line with police experience in order to increase comparability with police administrative data.
- Grouping of similar incidents (i.e. repeated incidents of family violence) to reduce response time while maintaining a high quality of data.
- Capping data related to frequency of incidents to reduce influence of outliers.

While each of the above design features is widely used in sample surveys, their combination makes the NZCVS highly efficient and delivering robust results. It is worth noting that over first six cycles of the NZCVS its response rate was consistently high, sometimes exceeding 80% and never below 71%.

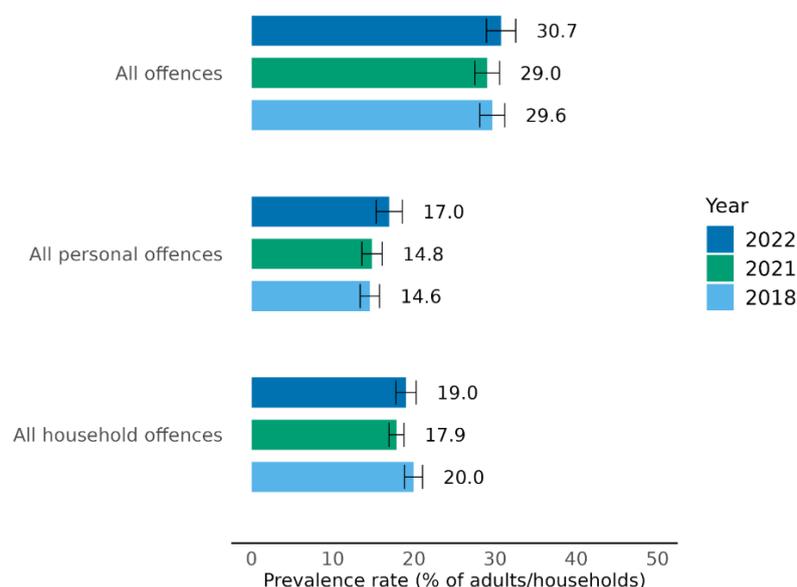
### Key finding (Cycle 5, November 2021 – November 2022)

This section summarises key finding based on Cycle 5 of the NZCVS which covers data collection between November 2021 and November 2022. Fieldwork started at the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak and continued up to the end of most outbreak related restrictions including the re-opening of New Zealand to non-residents. The full Cycle 5 survey report is available from the Ministry of Justice public website<sup>1</sup>.

### Prevalence of victimisation

Almost one in three New Zealander adults (31%) experienced crime over the last 12 months (see Figure 1).

- The proportion of adults experiencing crime is consistent with previous years.
- 367,000 households (19%) experienced one or more household offences, up from 18% in Cycle 4 (2021).
- 705,000 adults (17%) experienced one or more personal offences, up from 15% in Cycle 4 (2021).



**Figure 1. Prevalence rates of personal, household and all offences in Cycles 1, 4 and 5**

#### Notes

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

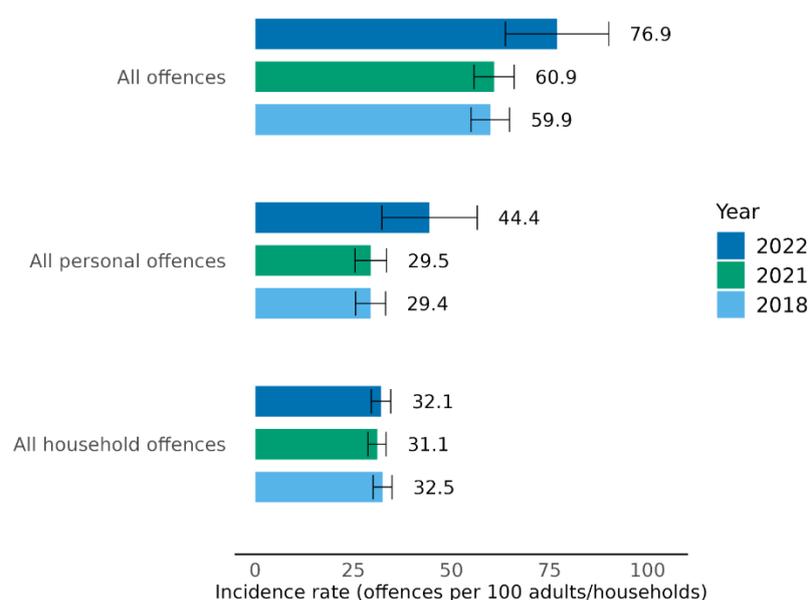
Prevalence rates for all offences and personal offences are measured in % of adults; prevalence rates for household offences are measured in % of households.

<sup>1</sup> [New Zealand Crime & Victims Survey \(NZCVS\) | New Zealand Ministry of Justice](#)

## Incidence of victimisation

Despite prevalence of victimisation being reasonably stable, victims experienced more incidents of crime compared to previous years (see Figure 2).

- Overall, New Zealanders experienced 2,466,000 incidents of crime (77 offences per 100 adults) over the last 12 months.
- Households experienced 619,000 household incidents (32 offences per 100 households) over the last 12 months.
- Adults experienced 1,847,000 personal incidents (44 offences per 100 adults) over the last 12 months.



**Figure 2. Incidence rates of personal, household and all offences in Cycles 1, 4 and 5**

### Notes

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Incidence rates for all offences and personal offences are measured in offences per 100 adults; incidence rates for household offences are measured in offences per 100 households.

### Most common crime

The increase in incidents were primarily driven by an increase in the amount of fraud and deception offences. The incidence and prevalence rates of fraud and deception significantly increased from Cycle 4 (2021). Fraud and deception was the most common type of offence, followed by burglaries and physical offences<sup>2</sup>:

- fraud and deception – 510,000 offences (experienced by 10.2% of adults), up from 288,000 offences (experienced by 6.2% of adults) in Cycle 4

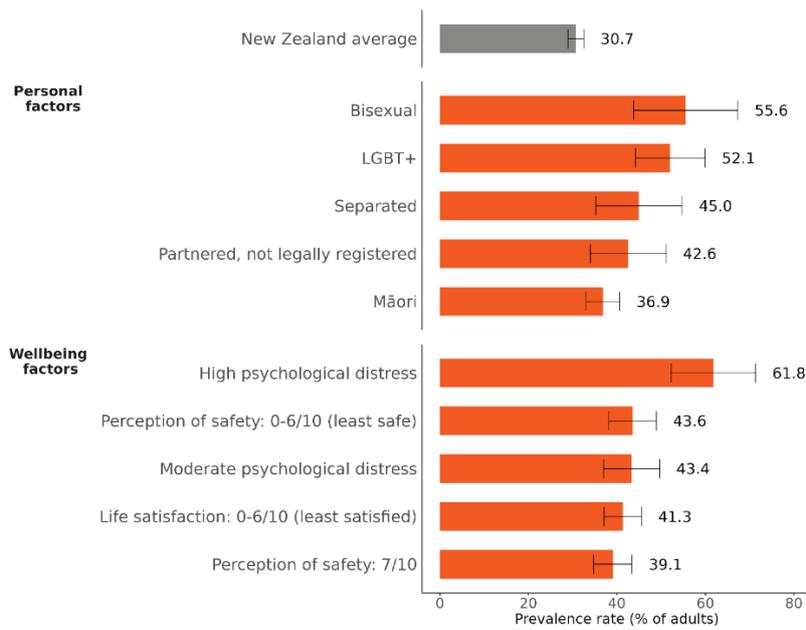
<sup>2</sup> Physical offences include robbery and non-sexual assault.

- burglaries – 288,000 offences (experienced by 9.6% of households), down from 289,000 offences (experienced by 9.3% of households) in Cycle 4
- physical offences – 253,000 offences (experienced by 2.2% of adults), up from 209,000 offences (experienced by 2.5% of adults) in Cycle 4.

### Population groups at higher risk of victimisation

People who identify as LGBT+<sup>3</sup>, separated adults, and Māori were significantly more likely to experience at least one crime (Figure 3).

- People who identified as LGBT+ were most likely experience at least one crime (52%), followed by separated adults (45%) and Māori (37%).
- Females were more likely to have experienced intimate partner violence than males (24% versus 10%) and sexual assault (36% versus 13%) in their lifetimes.
- People aged 65+ (19%) were significantly less likely to experience crime than the New Zealand average (31%).
- Adults living in the main urban centres were at no higher risk of experiencing crime than the average New Zealander (Auckland, 32%; Wellington, 29%; and Canterbury, 32%), but people in the rest of the South Island were significantly less likely to be victims of crime (24%).



**Figure 3. Cycle 5 prevalence rates for all offences, for demographic groups that experience a significantly higher offence prevalence rate than the New Zealand average**

#### Notes

The silver bar represents the New Zealand average; orange bars represent demographic factors that are statistically different from the average.

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Bisexual adults are a sub-section of the LGBT+ adults. Prevalence rate for bisexual adults is shown in addition to the overall LGBT+ data due to the high level of victimisation in bisexual adults.

<sup>3</sup> LGBT+ is a demographic group that includes transgender people and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or having another sexual identity.

## High concentration of crime

A small number of highly victimised individuals experienced most offences (Figure 4).

- There were 163,000 adults who experienced more than four or more offences (highly victimised) in the last 12 months. This represents 4% of all adults and 13% of all adults who experienced crime.
- Despite only being 4% of the population, highly victimised adults experienced 56% of all offences in the last 12 months, up from 47% of all offences in Cycle 4 (2021).
- This was particularly acute for interpersonal violence<sup>4</sup>. Individuals who have experienced more than one incident of interpersonal violence make up 2.5% of the adult population but have experienced 87% of all interpersonal violence offences.



**Figure 4. Proportion of victims and incidents by number of victimisations, in Cycles 1, 4 and 5**

## Smaller proportion of incidents reported to Police

Adults who experienced crime reported a smaller proportion of incidents to the Police, but there was an increase in the proportion of victims who reported at least one offence to the Police.

- The proportion of crime incidents reported to the Police was 19%, down from 25% in Cycle 4 (2021).
- The proportion of victims who reported at least one offence to the Police was 35%, up from 33% in Cycle 4 (2021).
- People were more likely to report household offences (34%) to the Police than personal offences (14%).
- The main contribution to the decrease in reporting rates was the reporting behaviour of highly victimised individuals (those who experience 4 or more offences over the last 12 months) who reported smaller proportion of offences to the police. They reported 16% of all offences to the Police in Cycle 5 compared to 25% in Cycle 4 (2021).
- Non-highly victimised adults also contributed to a small decrease in reporting rates (22% compared to 24% in Cycle 4). This reflects the increase in the amount of fraud and deception experienced in Cycle 5 which has a low reporting rate.

<sup>4</sup> Interpersonal violence includes sexual assault; other assault; harassment and threatening behaviour; robbery. It also includes damage of personal or household property if the victim knows the offender.

## Covid-19 and victimisation

The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the associated government responses, marked a period of significant societal change in New Zealand and the world. Since the pandemic began, numerous reports and articles have been written about how crime has changed, due to responses such as restricted movement and lockdowns. However, most reports and articles focused on changes in the crimes that were reported to the Police or other organisations, rather than changes in unreported crime.

The NZCVS provides unique data to analyse changes caused by the pandemic in both reported and unreported crime. This section summarises the key NZCVS findings resulting from comparison of victimisation data collected before the first nationwide lockdown (1 March 2018 to 21 March 2020) with data afterwards (3 July 2020 to 14 November 2022).

In the two years before the pandemic, the NZCVS did not reveal any significant changes in victimisation or reporting behaviour. However, since the outbreak of the pandemic, we observed trends that reflect long-term changes in victimisation and reporting behaviour including:

- A decrease in the proportion of households that were burgled.
- An increase in the proportion of people who experienced fraud and deception.
- An increase in the proportion of people who reported experiencing sexual assault during their lifetime.
- A decrease in reporting crime to the Police.
- A change in people's perception that interpersonal violence is "just something that happens" to something that is "crime".

### Changes in the offence type structure

The rate of overall victimisation pre- and post-COVID-19 remained stable at 30%. However, following the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak New Zealanders experienced fewer burglaries, and more fraud and deception offences.

- The proportion of households or adults that experienced a burglary decreased significantly from 12% to 9%.
- The proportion of adults who experienced fraud and deception rose significantly from 6% to 8%.

**Table 1. Crime prevalence rates before and after the COVID-19 outbreak, by offence type**

| Offence type              | Prevalence rate Before COVID-19 Outbreak (%) | Prevalence rate After COVID-19 Outbreak (%) | Percentage point change (%) <sup>a</sup> |
|---------------------------|--|---|--|
| All offences              | 30.2   | 29.7  | -0.5                                     |
| Household offences        | 20.0   | 18.2  | <b>-1.8</b>                              |
| Personal offences         | 14.8   | 15.8  | +1.0                                     |
| Burglary                  | 11.6   | 9.5   | <b>-2.1</b>                              |
| Fraud and deception       | 6.2  | 7.9   | <b>+1.7</b>                              |
| Interpersonal violence    | 7.3  | 6.9   | -0.4                                     |
| Vehicle offences          | 5.9  | 6.1   | +0.2                                     |
| Theft and damage offences | 4.8  | 4.6   | -0.2                                     |
| Trespass                  | 1.9  | 2.1   | +0.2                                     |

**Note:** the percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.

### Changes in victims' demographics

Demographic groups experienced changes in crime and victimisation rates unequally.

- Māori and Pacific adults experienced more significant decreases in burglaries than other ethnic groups.
- New Zealand European adults experienced more significant increases in fraud and deception offences than other ethnic groups.
- Adults who identify as LGBT+ and adults who have a high personal income (\$100,000 – \$150,000 annually) experienced the most significant increases in fraud and deception offences.
- All demographic groups experienced an increase in lifetime sexual assault, but those who usually face the highest risk of victimisation (such as adults aged 20 to 29 years and LGBT+ adults) experienced the biggest increases.

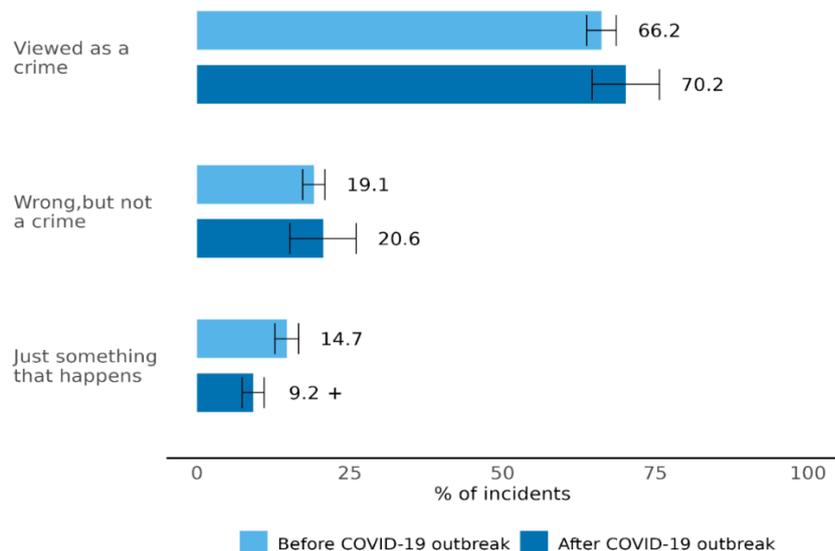
### Changes in public perceptions

A few public perceptions which were reasonably stable before the pandemic were changed since the arrival of COVID-19.

In particular, more New Zealanders than ever perceived that the incidents they experienced were crime. The NZCVS asks survey respondents whether they would describe the incidents they experienced as either a crime; wrong, but not a crime; or just something that happens. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the proportion of incidents perceived as “just something that happens” decreased significantly, from 15% of all incidents before the pandemic to 9% afterwards (Figure 5).

Consequently, after the COVID-19 outbreak, the percentage of incidents perceived as “crime” increased from 66% to 70%, although this increase was not statistically significant.

The percentage of incidents considered “wrong, but not a crime” remained stable.



**Figure 5. Percentage of incidents perceived by victims to be a crime, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19**

**Notes:**

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

+ sign means that the difference between the two time periods was statistically significant

The above trend applied especially to interpersonal violence offences (this includes sexual assaults) and offences by family members.

Also, New Zealanders were less likely than before to perceive that crime is driven by racial or sexual discrimination.

- The percentage of New Zealanders who perceived, overall, that crime is driven by discrimination did not change significantly.
- The percentage of New Zealanders who perceived that household offences are driven by racial discrimination decreased significantly, from 4% to 2%.
- The percentage of New Zealanders who perceived that sexual assault is driven by discrimination related to the victim’s sexuality decreased significantly, from 39% to 18%.<sup>5</sup>

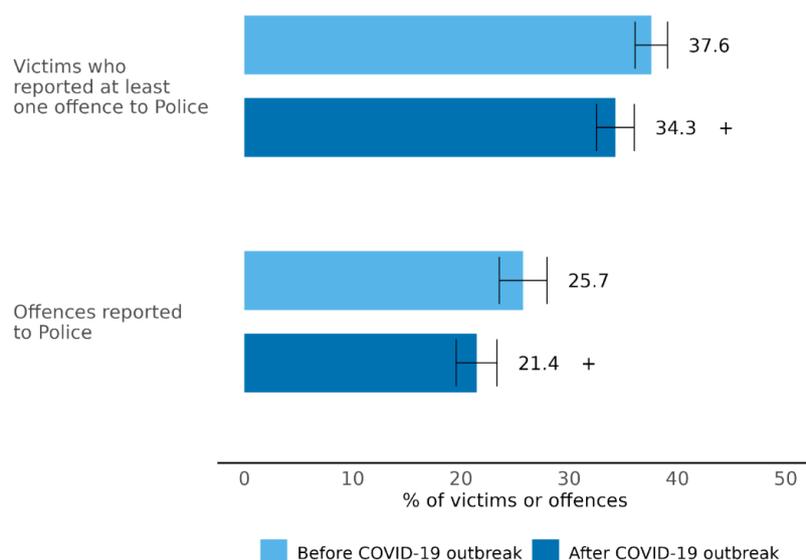
### Changes in reporting offences to the Police

The rates of reporting offences to the Police significantly decreased, but this was not driven by changes in adults’ perceptions of the Police.

<sup>5</sup> These percentages have a margin of error between 10 and 20 percentage points, or the estimate/mean has a relative sampling error between 20% and 50%, so it should be used cautiously.

The percentage of incidents that adults reported to the Police decreased significantly from 26% to 21% (see Figure 6). This decrease is mostly driven by the same factors reported in Cycle 5 and mentioned above. In particular, the decrease in the percentage of incidents reported is partly explained by highly victimised adults reporting fewer incidents. In contrast, the decrease in the percentage of victims who reported at least one offence appears to be driven by the reporting behaviour of adults who are not highly victimised.

- The percentage of victims who reported at least one offence decreased significantly from 38% to 34% – this decrease occurred in Cycle 4 but trends observed in Cycle 5 suggest this is now increasing.
- All demographic groups reported fewer incidents, but the rate of reporting at least one offence to the Police was especially low for victims who are Chinese or LGBT+, or who have a low personal or household income.
- Adults’ reasons for not reporting crime have not changed significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic began, which suggests that decreased reporting is not driven by changes in people’s perceptions of the Police.



**Figure 6. Percentage of victims who reported offences to the Police and percentage of offences reported, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19.**

**Notes**

Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

+ sign means that the difference between the two time periods was statistically significant.

**Changes in feeling of safety**

We also observed changes in feeling of safety for some demographic groups. Although overall adults’ perceptions of safety have not changed significantly since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, some demographic groups at low risk of victimisation did have a significantly higher perception of safety following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. These groups include adults who are heterosexual, New Zealand Europeans, retired, aged 65 years and over, and live in Hawke’s Bay, Wellington, or Southland (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Percentage of adults who feel completely safe, by demographic group, before and after the outbreak of COVID-19**

| Demographic group            | Rated perception of safety as 10 out of 10 (%) |                            |   |
|------------------------------|--|----------------------------|---|
|                              | Before COVID-19<br>Outbreak                    | After COVID-19<br>Outbreak | Percentage point<br>change (%) <sup>a</sup> |
| <b>New Zealand average</b>   | 27.1   | 28.8                       | <b>1.7</b>                                  |
| <b>Personal factors</b>      |  |                            |   |
| Aged 65 years and over       | 29.3   | 34.0 <sup>b</sup>          | <b>+4.7</b>                                 |
| Retired                      | 31.0 <sup>b</sup>                              | 35.2 <sup>b</sup>          | <b>+4.2</b>                                 |
| NZ European                  | 24.6 <sup>b</sup>                              | 27.2                       | <b>+2.6</b>                                 |
| Heterosexual or straight     | 27   | 29.3                       | <b>+2.3</b>                                 |
| <b>Household factors</b>     |  |                            |   |
| <b>One-person households</b> | 24.5 <sup>b</sup>                              | 30.1                       | <b>+5.6</b>                                 |
| <b>Geographic factors</b>    |  |                            |   |
| Southland                    | 30.1 <sup>b</sup>                              | 58.5 <sup>b d</sup>        | <b>+28.4</b>                                |
| Hawke's Bay                  | 14.7 <sup>b</sup>                              | 26.1 <sup>c</sup>          | <b>+11.4</b>                                |
| Wellington                   | 23.4   | 31.1                       | <b>+7.7</b>                                 |
| Large urban areas            | 26.1   | 33.1 <sup>b</sup>          | <b>+7.0</b>                                 |

**Notes**

- a. The percentage point changes in red represent statistically significant changes.
- b. The percentage is significantly different from the New Zealand average, or the relevant total, at the 95% confidence interval.
- c. The numerator or denominator of the ratio-based estimate has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so this estimate should be used cautiously.
- d. The percentage has a margin of error of between 10 and 20 percentage points, or the estimate/mean has a relative sampling error of 20% to 50%, so should be used cautiously.

## Looking ahead

The NZCVS is a live survey. While our priority is to deliver consistent results maintaining comparability of annual reports and robustness of time series based on survey data, we also regularly consider options to enhance and enrich the survey.

In particular, from Cycle 5 we report data which follows a new Stats NZ standard for gender, sex and variations of sex characteristics<sup>6</sup>. Starting from Cycle 7 (currently in the field) we collect data on iwi<sup>7</sup> affiliation for respondents with Māori descent in line with a new Stats NZ classification. Also, from

<sup>6</sup> [Data standard for gender, sex, and variations of sex characteristics | Stats NZ](#)

<sup>7</sup> Iwi (Māori pronunciation: ['iwi]) are the largest social units in New Zealand Māori society.

Cycle 7 we introduced a new module on public perceptions of the New Zealand justice system and its key components (police, courts, correctional organisations, lawyers, etc.). These data will further support relevant decision making, policy development and in-depth analysis of crime and victimisation in New Zealand.