

Crime and Violence in Hong Kong, China

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Introduction:

This case reports crime trends in Hong Kong, China (HKSAR) over the past 30 years and discusses why it has become one of the safest cities in the 21st Century.¹

HK has been ranked low in overall recorded crime per capita among industrialized countries surveyed in the Seventh United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (7th UNSCTOCJ, 1998 - 2000)². According to the 7th UNSCTOCJ, in 2000 the overall recorded crime rate per 100,000 population in HK was 1185.7 lower than Singapore (1202.6), Japan (1924.0), South Korea (3262.6), Italy (3822.8), France (6403.8), Canada (8040.6), & England & Wales (9766.7) but higher than Philippines (106.0), China (288.7), Malaysia (717.5) and Thailand (931.0). Nevertheless, Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) conducted for 2000 ranked HK 15th among 90 countries participating in the 2000 CPI. HK along with Singapore (ranked 6th) was perceived as one of the least corrupt jurisdictions in Asia.³ The comparatively higher perception of corruption in the Philippines, China, Malaysia, and Thailand suggests that their official recorded crime rates reported in the 7th UNSCTOCJ may be subject to extensive under-reporting of crime.

Despite HK's relatively low crime levels it has gone through several crises after PR China resumed sovereignty in July 1997⁴. Shortly after the transfer of sovereignty HK's economy suffered as a result of the collapse of the Thai stock market and the subsequent Asian financial crisis, which triggered the 1998 recession in the HK property market. An epidemic of SARS in 2003 further depressed the already weakened HK economy. These events intensified social instability and may have been reflected in an increase in the overall crime rate in 1999 and 2003, but the effect was temporary because the overall crime rate soon returned to the previous lower level in the following years. Formal and informal responses to these problems (for e.g. tax relief and social security) appear to have had a dampening effect on prolonged social instability.

¹ South China Morning Post, "It's true: HK is one of safest cities in the world". 7th October 2006

² The questionnaire consists of a series of questions asking for data, primarily statistical, on the main components of the criminal justice system for 1998 - 2000.

³ The 2000 CPI (90 countries) for Asia countries (rank): Singapore (6), HK (15), Japan (23), Taiwan (28), Malaysia (36), South Korea (48), Thailand (60), China (63), India (69), Philippines (69), Vietnam (76), and Indonesia (85). The 2006 CPI (163 countries) for Asia countries (rank): Singapore (5), Hong Kong (15), Japan (17), Macao (26), Taiwan (34), South Korea (42), Malaysia (44), Thailand (63), China (70), India (70), Vietnam (111), Philippines (121), and Indonesia (130). Source: <http://www.transparency.org>

⁴ Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of People's Republic of China (PRC) from July 1, 1997.

Considering crime control and ‘punitiveness’ the 7th UNSCTOCJ survey shows HK ranked among the largest police forces per capita with 487 police per 100,000 persons. Only Portugal (491.2) and Italy (559.4) exceeded HK while most other Asian jurisdictions had proportionally smaller forces (e.g. Philippines 147.8, Japan 181.7, South Korea 190.7, Singapore 324.2, Malaysia 353.6, and Thailand 354.9). HK’s large police force exceeds that of most industrialized countries such as Canada (181.9), France (211.0), Australia (219.0), and England & Wales (233.9). According to the 7th UNSCTOCJ, HK also has a moderately high incarceration rate per 100,000 of population. The HK incarceration rate in 2000 was 176.8 higher than Japan (48.2), France (87.3), Italy (93.7), Australia (113.1), England & Wales (123.1), and South Korea (134.2), but was notably lower than Malaysia (339.9), Thailand (368.0), Singapore (411.5), and the USA (638.1).

HK has also been relatively free from large-scale public disorder and this partly reflects the success of a proactive strategy of crime prevention and control. Partnerships between the private sector, government and the community are strongly encouraged. The police are actively engaged in youth work and sponsoring youth clubs – notably Junior Police Call with over 130, 000 children regularly involved. Following the British model of crime control that focuses on offender rehabilitation, HK has developed its own integrated welfare-control correctional model. For instance, in 2006 more than one-fifth of the HKSAR government budget was spent on security (10%, HK\$27,050 million) and social welfare (13.7%, HK\$36,231 million).⁵ Social welfare policies have received increasing attention reflected by the rising proportion of the government’s budget devoted to this area from 2001 (11.0%) to 2006 (13.7%).

The low crime rate in HK may reflect the relative effectiveness of law enforcement as noted in the relatively high incarceration rate, large police force and the significant public resources allocated. Nevertheless, state action accounts for only part of the reason for the stability and low crime levels experienced in HK and the role of socio-cultural and other factors are relevant. The successful transition from a once suppressive colonial quasi-military police force into the current service-based, client-oriented community policing practice of the modern period contributed to effective crime prevention (Gaylord & Traver, 1995; Lo & Cheuk, 2003). Local pro-social traditions, such as utilitarian familism (Lau, 1982), also serve informal social control and crime prevention.

Compared to other cities, Hong Kong’s crime rate is very low, especially for offences such as burglary, car theft and robbery, offences notable for their sensitivity to environmental and situational determinants. As we shall see, this low rate of crime is supported by the results of the periodic crime victim surveys undertaken in Hong Kong, even though the surveys show much higher levels of crime than official police records.

⁵ HK’s annual public expenditure is HK\$264,889 million allocated elsewhere: education (21.3%), health (12.2%), infrastructure (9.2%), housing (6.0%), economic (5.8%), environment and food (4.4%), community and external affairs (3.2%), support (14.0%). Source: <http://www.budget.gov.hk/2006/>

In the following we first provide an introduction to HK and its crime situation (section 2). We examine published official police statistics and compare these with crime victim surveys. From this we note that changes in the proportion of young people (the part of the population with highest risk of offending in the past) have been an important factor in driving crime rates in HK (section 3). We consequently focus on how the HK Police and the Fight Crime Committee, two leading crime prevention agencies in HK, interacted with the public to handle the crime issue at the end of the colonial period (section 4). Finally this study attempts to predict how crime may develop in the future and summarizes what can be learnt from the HK experience (section 5).

Background of Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a delta area located at the exit of Pearl River in the southern part of coastal China. The total area of HK is 2,757 km² of which 1,107 km² is land. Since the 1990s population of HK has increased markedly – the total HK population at 2006 was 6,943,600 with a density of 6,272 people per km². HK is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. It is also, by population, the fifth largest metropolitan area of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Figure 1 Location of Hong Kong



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Hong_Kong_Location.png

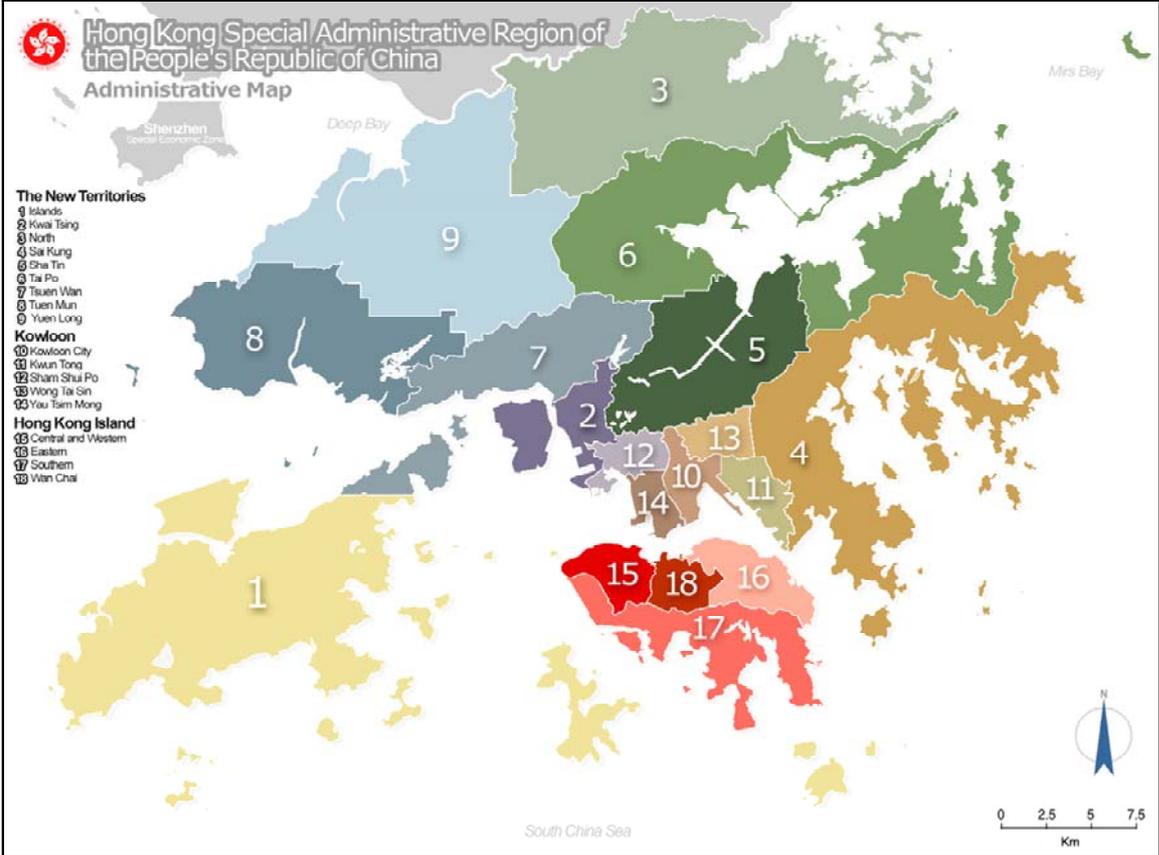
About 96% of HK's population is of Chinese descent, the majority of which are Cantonese speakers. The HK mortality rate in 2005 was 5.5% (38,683 deceased) while the birth rate was 8.3%.⁶ The fertility rate of HK was 0.95 children per woman, one of the lowest in the world, and far below the 2.1 children per woman required to maintain an even population level. Nevertheless, the population is continuously growing due to the immigration of approximately 45,000 people per year from Mainland China.⁷

⁶ Source: HKSAR Coroner's Report 2005.

⁷ Source: http://censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistic

Geographically, Hong Kong consists of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories.⁸ The northern part of Hong Kong – the New Territories is contiguous to the Shenzhen Special Administrative Zone PR China across the Shenzhen River. Moving south is the Kowloon Peninsula and then HK Island, which is the most populated among the 236 HK islands located in the South China Sea, while Lantau Island is the largest.⁹

Figure 2 The 18 districts of Hong Kong



Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Hk_map_18.png

HK was established as an international trading port in the mid 19th Century but its trading role in the region may date back to as early as the ancient Chinese Tang and Song Dynasties. After the First Opium War in 1841 by the Treaty of Nanking (1842) and the Second Opium War in 1860 (Convention of Peking 1860), HK Island and Kowloon Peninsula were formally ceded to the British by the Qing Dynasty. The New Territories were then leased by Britain for 99 years, from 1 July 1898 to 30 June 1997.

⁸ The population density of Hong Kong Island is 15,880, Kowloon is 44,110, and New Territories is 3,770.

⁹ Hong Kong's climate is cool and dry in the wintertime which lasts from around January to March, and is hot, humid and rainy from spring through summer. ..

Under Deng Xiaoping's leadership in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the PRC adopted 'socialist market' economic reforms as part of the 'Open Door Policy' in the late 1970s and as a consequence HK's *entrepot* position was revived. Since the 1970s HK also has developed its financial and banking economy and began moving away from the once dominant textile industry. In 2006, the Heritage Foundation/*The Wall Street Journal* ranked HK 1st out of 157 Countries in their 'Index of Economic Freedom' – for the 11th consecutive occasion. The gross domestic product at purchasing power parity per capita (GDP [PPP] per capita) of HK reached \$346,710 in 2006.¹⁰ HK ranked 8th in GDP (PPP) \$ per capita among 181 members of the International Monetary Fund in 2005, which was also the highest among all the Asian members.¹¹

The PRC and United Kingdom signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the 19th of December 1984, where both agreed the whole territory of HK under then British rule would become the HKSAR of the PRC on 1 July 1997. In the Joint Declaration, the PRC promised that under the "One Country, Two Systems" policy proposed by Deng Xiaoping, the socialist economic system in mainland China would not be practiced in HK, and HK's capitalist system and life-style would remain unchanged for at least 50 years, or until 2047. During this period HK would enjoy a high degree of autonomy in all matters except diplomatic affairs and national defense.¹²

Crime 'waves' in Hong Kong

Despite its economic success and safe city status, HK has experienced several crime waves and three major civil disturbances in the last half century. After the riots in 1967, HK recorded a continuous increase in its crime rate but also the HKP and the government embarked on a new era of crime prevention. In this section, we focus on the crime trends. How the former Royal HKP reformed and began to combat the rising crime rates will be discussed in Section 4.

The official figures of police recorded crime in HK featured a rapid rise during the early 1970s and this was maintained between 1974 (1294 per 100,000) and 1995 (1493 per 100,000). The overall recorded crime rate rose from 407 per 100,000 in 1963 to a peak of 1610 in 1983. The violent crime rate rose tenfold from 1963 (48 per 100,000) to peak at 477 in 1976 and declined gradually from then on although rebounding from 259 in 1986 to 340 in 1991. The year of the handover, 1997, documented a comparatively low overall (1038) and violent (212) crime rate. Notably, the overall reduction in official crime matched the declining population group aged 15-29 – the age group that usually accounts for the majority of the crime committed. The 15-29 population decreased by 15% from a high of 1,643,400 in 1980 to 1,396,700 in 2005, whereas overall crime and violent crime decreased by 25% and 43.1% respectively (see Figure 3).

¹⁰ Source: <http://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2005/>

¹¹ GDP (PPP) \$ per capita calculations as prepared by International Monetary Fund in 2005: Hong Kong (\$33,479), Japan (\$30,615), Singapore (\$28,368), Republic of China (Taiwan) (\$27,721), South Korea (\$20,590), Malaysia (\$11,201), Thailand (\$8,368), PRC (\$7,198), Philippines (\$4,923), Indonesia (\$4,459), India (\$3,320), Vietnam (\$3,025)

¹² Source: <http://www.info.gov.hk/info/hkbrief>

Trends for serious offences such as, homicide, rape and robbery (with firearms) exhibit periodic ‘crime waves’ between 1961 and 2005 (see Figure 4). Homicide is a robust temporal measure of violent crime because it is less subject to the vagaries of reporting, recording and definitional changes. Police recorded homicide rates increased 3.5 times from 0.79 (n=17) in 1961 to 2.79 (n=115) in 1972. The spike in 1967 was a direct consequence of the civil disturbances that occurred in the same year. The homicide rate then dropped quickly between 1972 and 1977 before turning upward again to 2.03 in 1981. The rate reached its second highest level in 1990 (2.40, n=137) before gradually decreasing to 0.49 (n=34) in 2005. Rates for firearm robbery experienced a similar trend. Robbery with a firearm peaked at 1.5 per 100,000 in 1975 (n=66) declined to 1.16 in 1990 (n=66) thereafter it declined to one-tenth of these levels at 0.11 per 100,000 in 2005 (n=8).

Early official statistics for rape indicate an under-reporting problem. Changes in recorded rape often reflect shifting patterns of victim reporting behaviour and/or

Figure 3 All crime and violent crime rates in Hong Kong, 1961-2005

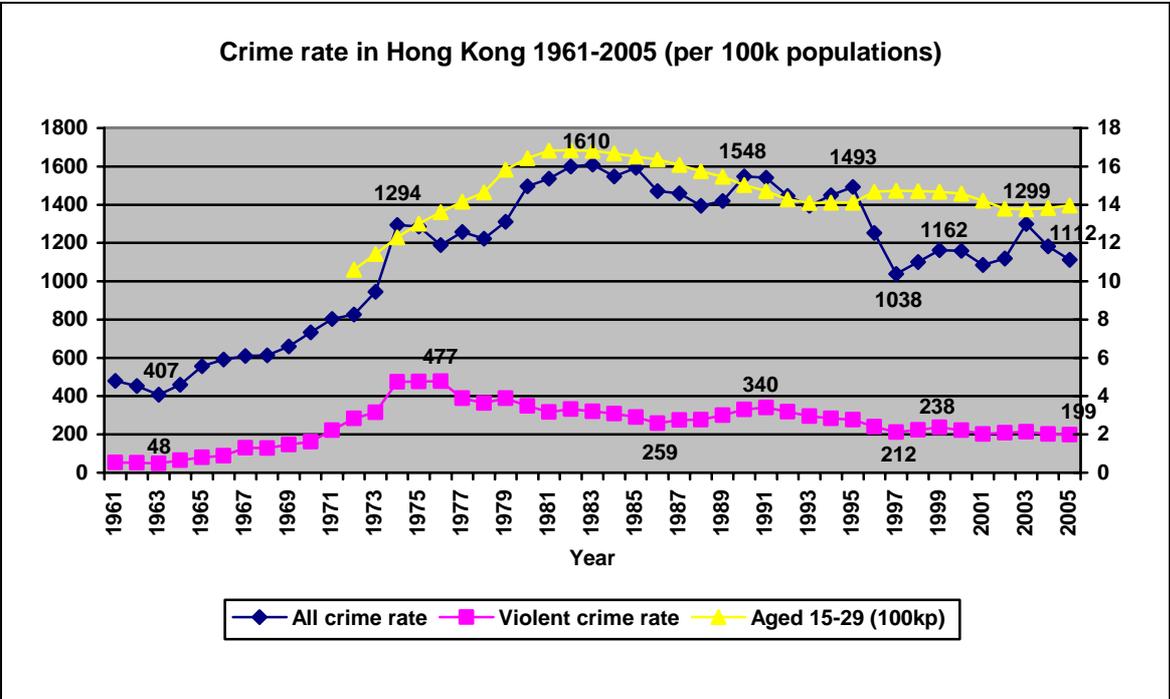
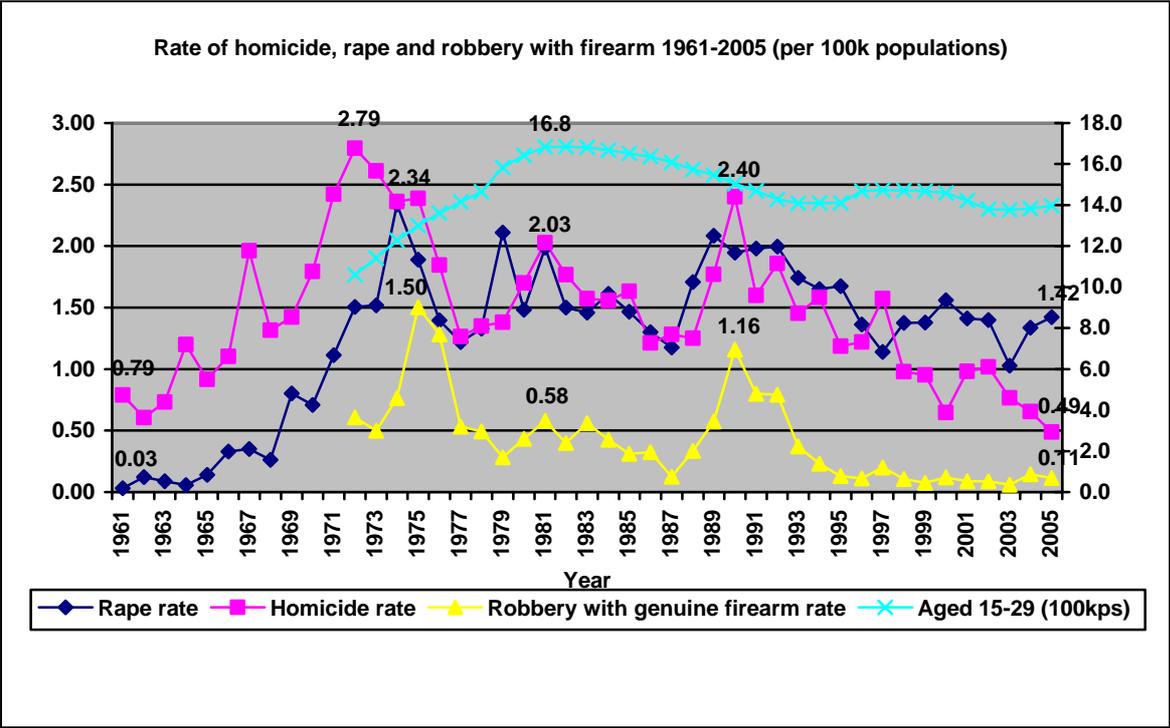


Figure 4 Rates of homicide, rape, and robbery with firearms in Hong Kong, 1961-2005



improving police administrative procedures, rather than ‘real’ fluctuations in crime. In 1961 there was only one police recorded rape incident (0.03) in a population of 3,168,100, while the next few years (1962-5) incidents averaged about five cases per annum. From 1968 onward the rate rose quickly reaching its highest recorded rate in 1974 (2.34, n=101). After fluctuating for a few years the recorded rape rate plateaued between 1988 and 1996, but again peaked in 1989 (2.08, n=120).

Age cohort and arrest rate

How the role of younger age cohorts influenced the crime rate in HK is illustrated in table 1. Between the years 1990-2005, the number of arrested persons dropped for both “age group 16-30” and “age group 31 or above”, but the proportion of the younger group declined among the arrested population from 51% to 36% (-15%), while the proportion of the older group increased from 34% to 53% (+19%). Coincidentally, the percentage of “age group 15-29” decreased from 26% of the total HK population to 20% while the percentage of “age group 30 or above” increased from 52% to 66%. The percentage of violent crime of all reported crime also reduced from 21% to 18%. This suggests the proportion of higher risk juveniles and youths, as in other jurisdictions, could be an influential factor in the fluctuation of crime. The significant contribution to the crime problem by juveniles and youth thus merited additional government concern and included various interventions, sanctions and policies that led to the promotion of partnerships between the Government and the HK community.

Table 1 Age and arrest rate

	1990	1995	2000	2005
Overall crime (no.)	88300	91886	77245	77437
Overall crime rate (per 100,000)	1547.9	1492.6	1159.0	1111.7
Violent crime (no.)	18820	17087	14812	13890
Violent crime (rate per 100,000)	329.9	277.6	222.2	199.4
Violent crime (% of all crime)	21	19	19	18
Total arrest (no.)	43713	53098	40930	40804
Total arrest (rate per 100,000)	766.3	862.5	614.1	585.8
Arrested aged 16-30 (no.)	22312	23950	17442	14737
Arrested aged 16-30 (% of all)	51	45	43	36
Population aged 15-29 (no.)	1503400	1410600	1458300	1396700
Population aged 15-29 (% of all)	26	23	22	20
Arrested aged 31 or above (no.)	14818	22425	17259	21536
Arrested aged 31 or above (% of all)	34	42	42	53
Population aged 30 or above (no.)	2974800	3550400	4138400	4587500
Population aged 30 or above (% of all)	52	58	62	66

*Note: Juvenile refers to those aged 7-15 prior to July 2003. They refer to those aged 10-15 thereafter due to the change in the minimum age of criminal liability.

Source: *Fight Crime Committee Report 2005*.

Crime Victim Surveys (HK CVS): an alternative view of crime in Hong Kong

As mentioned in the introduction, estimations of the risk of criminal victimization are provided by the seven official sweeps of the HK Crime Victim Surveys (HKCVS)¹³ conducted in 1978, 1981, 1986, 1989, 1994, 1998 and 2006. The most recent HKCVS was conducted in 2006; however, results are not available at the time of writing so only the last published findings for 1998 – the fifth survey are reported. Conducted in January 1999, the survey contacted 17,602 households and interviewed 49,942 persons 12 years and over from an eligible population of 5,674,600 persons and 2 million households (or 0.88% of persons). The survey scope is confined to crimes against the person or

¹³ The HKCVS is subject to non-sampling error because it depends on the respondent's memory, honesty and willingness to cooperate, but face-to-face interviews can help reduce ambiguous and inconsistent responses about victimization. Large samples produce more reliable estimates but, for some rare crimes the sample may be too small for reliable estimation. Repeated surveys provide valuable guidance on trends and the impact of crime policies.

household crimes and excludes some serious crimes (such as corruption and commercial crime).¹⁴

Prevalence of crime victimization in HK

Overall, 352,200 crimes were estimated for 1998 and 175,400 persons experienced 192,700 criminal events at a rate of 3.4% of persons for personal crime or 4.1% if minor offences excluded in the 1998 count are included (see notes Table 2) Also 137,900 'households' experienced 159,500 crimes at a rate of 7.98% of households, This is one of the lowest rates of victimization among the industrialized nations (van Dijk & Kesteren 1996; Newman 1999). About 5% (9,100 persons) of the victims of personal crime experienced more than five victimization events in 1998, showing that some segments of the population are at very high risk. Overall, 14.8% (52,300) of the crimes reported to the survey involved crimes of violence, 39.9% (140,400) theft from persons, and 45.3% (159,500) crimes affecting households such as burglary and theft of cars. The general trends of personal crime victimization show decreases in risks compared to previous sweeps in most age groups, except for a significant rise in 1998 reported by the youngest respondents. Overall, women are more at risk of personal theft and violence, but males have higher risks of violent offences in the 12–19 years age group and women in the 40–49 age group. Violent and personal crime victimization peaks for either sex in the younger 12–19 age groups.

Reporting Behaviour

The proportion of respondents who claim to have reported offences to the HKP appears to have peaked in the 1989 sweep, thereafter declining, especially for crimes of violence. The reporting rates for personal crimes of theft remain fairly stable at around two in five cases since the mandatory requirement to carry an identification card for all those over 15 years was introduced in 1980. Household crime is not often reported, despite the incentive of insurance, but this crime includes a large number of criminal damage offences, attempted burglary, and other minor thefts where the victim suffered little or no loss. Generally in 1998, about 20% of victims suffered no loss and 33.5% losses of HK\$150 or less, but for household crimes the proportion resulting in losses of HK\$150 or less was higher at 42.2%. For crimes of violence 80% of victims sustained no injuries, but the majority of those victims (63%) who reported to the police sustained injury, which indicates the importance of evidence of an offence (e.g. injury) in reporting behaviour.

People fail to report victimization for many reasons: about half (49.4%) reflect a 'no need to report' attitude and most (34.7%) don't report because they suffered little or no loss; over a quarter (28.1%) believed that 'nothing could be done' due to lack of evidence (15.3%) and that police could not or would not help; a further 14.6% attributed not reporting to difficult procedures or they were 'too busy';¹⁵ and a further 7.4% gave other reasons including reporting to someone else or fear of reprisal.

¹⁴ The text of this section is drawn from Broadhurst (2005).

¹⁵ Note 39,000 'minor offences' comprising: 1,400 attempted assault; 15,600 attempted pick-pocketing, 4,300 common assault with no injury and; 17,700 involving objects dropped

Table 2 Trends in HKCVS estimates of crime, 1978-1998

	1978	1981	1986	1989	1994	1998
All personal						
% population	2.19	3.92	4.02	2.43	3.32	3.40
% report to police	18.0	37.7	39.1	42.2	38.9	36.3
Crimes of violence						
% population	0.98	0.98	0.95	0.67	1.05	0.92
% report to police	28.4	41.2	38.4	44.6	34.5	31.3
Personal crimes of theft						
% population	1.20	2.94	3.01	1.75	2.27	2.47
% report to police	9.5	36.6	39.4	41.3	40.9	38.2
All household crimes						
% population	4.65	8.64	7.37	6.12	9.34	7.98
% report to police	18.7	15.0	19.6	24.2	22.2	20.7

Source: Hong Kong 1999, Table 73 and Table 84: Rates for 1998 are depressed because of the exclusion of attempted and common assaults and other 'minor' offences¹⁶.

Analysis shows that the better-educated and higher income groups are more likely to report to police. There is also considerable variation in the levels of reporting depending on the gravity of the offence and the relationship of the victim to the offender. Respondents also report that a friend had contacted police or assume the victimization was only a private matter (van Dijk & van Kesteren 1996; Alvazzi del Frate 1998). The importance of reporting behaviour in understanding the nature and prevalence of crime is borne out in Table 3, which compares police-recorded crime rates with estimates from the HKCVS that reflect the experience (and perception) of criminal victimization for selected offences.

HKP and CVS statistics compared:

Some offences compared in Table 3 show contradictory trends and different periods of high and low rates depending on the source: HKP or HK CVS..

from a height without injury were excluded from the 1998 data and thus the overall rate compared to previous years is artificially reduced

¹⁶ A small number of respondents (2.5 per cent) said they did not report because they were 'too busy' with as many as 10 per cent of snatching victims giving this as the reason for not reporting.

Table 3 HKCVS and HKP trends for select offences

	1978	1981	1986	1989	1994	1998
Rape & indecent assault						
HKCVS rate	58	32	127	126	165	376
Police rate	34	33	33	41	39	39
Wounding & assault						
HKCVS rate	48	83	225	121	162	181
Police rate	13	99	103	123	107	129
Robbery						
HKCVS rate	661	633	284	229	295	200
Police Rate	123	160	122	114	103	48
Blackmail						
HKCVS rate	17	17	71	33	99	25
Police rate	58	22	12	10	14	7
Criminal intimidation						
HKCVS rate	48	35	145	102	233	251
Police rate	14	10	9	10	14	15
Snatching						
HKCVS rate	78	146	172	111	198	129
Police rate	16	39	33	26	27	14
Pick pocketing						
HKCVS rate	683	1795	1635	784	947	1142
Police rate	23	44	56	17	14	10
Deception/Fraud						
HKCVS rate	26	18	96	128	116	112
Police rate	60	85	33	31	53	41
Burglary						
HKCVS rate	361	698	659	545	630	576
Police rate	118	206	216	192	223	146
Theft from Vehicle						
HKCVS rate	196	322	291	220	431	312
Police rate	45	93	94	91	63	42
Criminal Damage						
HKCVS rate	35	74	94	141	408	320
Police rate	40	59	82	96	96	100

Note: Rates per 100 000 total population are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Except for robbery, the data shows relatively low rates in 1978 that increase substantially in the 1980s and then decline or remain below peak levels, but higher than those found in 1978. Generally both measures indicate increases in wounding and assault, criminal damage and burglary, and declines in robbery. Trends in victim data show steep increases in sexual assaults, criminal intimidation, theft from vehicles, snatching and pick pocketing, whereas rates based on police figures show slight increases for sexual assault, stable rates for intimidation and theft from vehicles but declines in pick

pocketing. Blackmail and fraud victim rates indicate increases since 1978, but police rates indicate significant declines.

The United Nations International Crime Victim Survey (UN ICVS)

A more recent victim survey that has received extensive media coverage was the UN ICVS, which provides an independent source about crime victim in HK. The survey was carried out by the University of Hong Kong¹⁷, in the second quarter of 2006 and surveyed a sample of 2083 households about their crime victimization experience in 2005. Employing the method of computer-assisted-telephone-interview (CATI), respondents were asked about ten conventional crimes including car theft, theft from car, motor-cycle theft, bicycle theft, burglary, attempted burglary, robbery, personal property theft, sexual victimization, assaults & threats.

Weighted¹⁸ result of the UN HKICVS revealed that 7.9% of HK citizens experienced at least one crime in the year 2005. Experience of household crime was quite low, while none of the respondents encountered car theft, 0.5% and 0.1% experienced theft from car and motorcycle theft respectively.¹⁹ Property crimes outside the household setting were not uncommon as 1.3% HK citizens experienced bicycle theft and 3.6% personal property theft. Robbery rarely took place (0.4%), while some 1.2% of citizens were sexually victimized and another 1.2% assaulted/threatened.

Compared to other industrialized countries surveyed in the year 2000,²⁰ crime victimization in HK is lower than western countries but similar to Asian countries. Using Japan for comparison, HK has lower household crime, such as vehicle theft and burglary/attempted, but a higher personal victimization rate such as theft, assault/threat and robbery (see Table 4 below).

¹⁷ The survey was conducted by the Centre for Criminology and Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Hong Kong.

¹⁸ Percentages are adjusted by age, gender and district to reflect the actual population distribution of HK.

¹⁹ If only owners of each type of vehicle were counted, the percentages victimized at least once are: car theft (0%), theft from car (2.2%), motor-cycle theft (2.9%), bicycle theft (4.2%).

²⁰ The most recent UN ICVS result is not available yet thus we used 2000 ICVS result for comparison.

Table 4 Hong Kong UNICVS 2006 compared with industrialized countries in the 4th UN ICVS ***

	Surveyed year**	Car theft	Theft from car	Motor-cycle theft	Bicycle theft	Burglary	Attempted burglary	Robbery	Personal property theft	Sexual victimization	Assaults & threats
Australia	1999	1.9	6.8	0.1	2.0	3.9	3.3	1.2	6.5	4.0	6.4
Canada	1999	1.4	5.4	0.1	3.5	2.3	2.3	0.9	4.7	2.1	5.3
England & Wales	1999	2.1	6.4	0.4	2.4	2.8	2.8	1.2	4.6	2.7	6.1
France	1999	1.7	5.5	0.3	1.8	1.0	1.3	1.1	3.0	1.1	4.2
Japan	1999	0.1	1.6	1.0	6.6	1.1	0.8	0.1	0.5	1.2	0.4
Sweden	1999	1.3	5.3	0.4	7.2	1.7	0.7	0.9	5.8	2.6	3.8
USA	1999	0.5	6.4	0.3	2.1	1.8	2.7	0.6	4.9	1.5	3.4
All 17 Countries*	1999	1.0	4.6	0.3	3.2	1.8	1.8	0.8	3.9	1.7	3.5
Hong Kong	2005	0	0.5	0.1	1.3	0.6	0.4	0.4	3.6	1.2	1.2

*Source: Van Kesteren, Mayhew, & Nieuwbeerta (2000) 'Criminal Victimization in Seventeen Industrialized Countries: Key-findings from the 2000 International Crime Victims Survey'. The Hague, Ministry of Justice, WODC. *The 17 industrialized countries were: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Catalonia, Denmark, England & Wales, Finland, France, Japan, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, USA. **As data from the 2005 UN ICVS was not available at the time of this paper, comparisons refer to the 2000 survey result. ***Only 2005 for HK and 1999 for the other countries*

Hong Kong's community-based crime prevention model

How HK has emerged as a 'safe' city is a complex topic that can only be partly discussed in this paper. As community support is crucial in crime prevention, the focus is on how the HKP managed the importance of partnerships with the community in order to fight crime and enjoys high levels of support: 93% of residents reported to the UNICVS that they felt "very" or "fairly safe" walking alone at night.

A short history

Policing based on community support (community policing) was at first an alien concept in HK. Dominated by mercantilism, the British colonial government ruled HK with the primary task of providing an environment where trade could be smoothly conducted. Inter-racial interactions were limited and residential segregation of the Chinese and the Westerners was enforced. Fearing Chinese nationalism and criminal activities, the mobility and the activities of the Chinese were closely monitored and controlled. Holding a deep mistrust of the Chinese the Police Force was established in 1841 based on the colonial model emphasizing public order and coercion by alien officers. The Colonial Police Force was a garrison style force and lived in barracks with local Chinese accounting for only a small minority of constables (Crissell and Watson 1982). The earlier HKP was viewed with feelings of fear and disrespect given their paramilitary and colonial attributes. but it was mostly successful in maintaining public order amidst successive periods of social unrest including the communist-led general strike in 1925-6, the 1956 riot by the Pro-Chinese Nationalists, the 1966 riot triggered by discontentment over poor living conditions and soaring costs, and the 1967 pro-communist riots against British colonialism.

The industrialization process after WWII produced social problems, notably a class of urban poor, aggravated by the continuous influx of migrants (Leung 1996). Long cherished anti-colonialism and intense social discontent finally erupted in the 1966 and 1967 riots. The Colonial government realized that it could no longer ignore local demands and thus a series of reforms were carried out to address the grassroots grievances (Scott, 1989; Leung, 1996). The 1968 *Employment Ordinance* improved and regulated working conditions, while large scale public housing programmes helped accommodate the poor and immigrants (Leung 1996). To further establish the legitimacy of the Colonial Government, the City District Officer Scheme was put in place in 1968 to enhance communication between the government and locals. Chinese was recognized as an official language in 1974. The same year also witnessed the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) - a model effort to eliminate corruption in government.

Promoting partnership in crime prevention

The most urgent task for the colonial Royal HKP was to improve communication and public relations and invite partnership of the community to fight crime. The Information Bureau (1968) and the Police Community Relations Officer (PCRO) Scheme (1974)

were the first initiatives but as crime rates continued to rise, the Fight Violent Crime Campaign and the Neighborhood Police Unit (NPU) were also launched in the same year to encourage community cooperation and reporting behaviour. Each formed by a small team of police, the NPUs were attached to neighborhoods to enhance mutual understanding via beat patrolling.

As indicated in Section 2, the crime rate continued to increase in the late 1960s with the expansion of the high risk 15-29 age-group. The Junior Police Call (JPC) scheme and the Police School Liaison (PSL) scheme were initiated in 1974 to strengthen control over youth. The PSL provides advice to schools about crime prevention and the juvenile justice system. The JPC is tasked to divert youth from 'undesirable attractions' to 'healthy activities' such as fight-crime and anti-drug carnivals. Currently, the JPC is the largest youth organization in Hong Kong, with 144,203 members territory-wide but its popularity appears to be in decline.

In addition the Central and District Fight Crime Committees (FCC) were established in the mid 1970s to invite local elites to work with the police and other government officials on crime prevention strategies. The FCC determines ways in which the public can be stimulated to contribute to the reduction of crime and it remains important as an advisory body with special focus on the war against drugs and money laundering, as well as reducing commercial crime and domestic violence²¹. Complementary to these advisory bodies, local shops and residents organizations are visited regularly for crime prevention advice on crimes that occur in the neighborhood, or about special arrangements and precautions for a special event, such as a demonstration or a procession.

Despite criticism that there was a lack of commitment by the HKP to carry through community-based policing (Lau 2004), these initiatives seemed to be successful in boosting confidence in police and increased the willingness to report crime. Corresponding to the introduction of community policing in the 1970s, the reporting rate for violent crime increased from 28.4% in 1978 to 41.2% in 1981 (Table 3). At the same time, violent crime rate remained static between 1978 and 1981 and then declined in 1986, despite increases in the number of youths aged 15-29 until 1983 (see Table 4 and Figure 4).

Community policing after fast expansion in the 1970s (Lo & Cheuk, 2004) was scaled back. In 1984 the NPU was replaced by the neighborhood police coordinator. Coinciding with the retraction of neighbourhood level services the reporting rate for violent crime fell slightly to 38.4% in 1986 although the reporting of property crimes continued to increase. Neighborhood Watch (NW) Scheme were then introduced in the mid 1980s and by 1989 involved 140000 households. The reporting rate for violent crime also returned to 44.6% (Table 4).

The emergence of a service culture

To gauge the public's perception of the HKP, opinion surveys have been regularly carried out since 1995 – public confidence has grown and the HKP enjoys high approval.

²¹ See press release of the 2006 Fight Crime Conference, HKSAR, 25 Nov 2006.

To prepare for the reversion of HK to China, HKP underwent rapid localization and by 1989 99% of HKP are Chinese. In order to bring in high quality officers the Police Mentorship Programme and Auxiliary Undergraduate Scheme were introduced. On top of traditional training, new recruits are required to study psychology and social studies at tertiary level, and to actively participate in volunteer works (HKP Review 2005). Despite a fall in the youth population and the subsequent decline in the popularity of JPC, the control of juvenile delinquency remains an important component. The utilization of technology to promote communication is another new approach involving the use of the internet to report crime via the 'e-report'. Mass crime prevention advice targeting different risk groups are also made possible with the Internet.

Having strived to improve its image and relations with the public, the HKP has in general obtained the support of the HK people, and successfully transformed from the often 'rough and corrupted bullies' of the colonial past into a professional and modern police service. This high level of legitimacy despite sporadic criticism about police misbehaviour and corruption reflects the reform efforts. According to the 2006 UN ICVS, 94% of respondents reported that police in their areas had done a "fairly good job" or a "very good job" in controlling crime. Nonetheless, Lau (2004) argued that community-policing strategies cover only the outer flesh of the HKP. At core, the HKP still retains many of its paramilitary traditions. The role of the community in crime control is thus passive and limited to being "cooperative" and "informative". Modern technology and resources constraints have also changed the form of implementation of community policing and it has shifted from the emphasis on personal contacts to efficient if more impersonal communication on line.

Community policing is a vague concept, and, the HKP have promoted the approach as a means to: develop positive relations with the public; strengthen the rule of law; legitimize police practices and; extend police power and secure additional funding. So far HK has been able to combine paramilitary traditions with the application of community policing to enhance its legitimacy. However, whether this hybrid type of policing continues to work is debatable. HK people are becoming more aware of their civil rights and more critical of government policies and thus are less complaint than in the past. Many frontline officers find it stressful to balance the demands of being crime fighters and 'service' providers (Lau 2004). Reporting rates appear to have declined after rising in response to the initiatives of the 1970s and this may suggest that the influence of HK style "community policing" may have reached natural limits and the time to readjust current community-based strategies will become necessary.

Conclusion

Why HK has a lower than expected level of crime despite its dense urban environment is an important question? The protective value of cultural and ethnic homogeneity combined with the preservation of traditional Confucianist values and extended kinship structures are crucial, but the resultant compliant pro-social society could also be a reflection of the 'collective apathy' associated with utilitarian familism (Lau, 1982). However the pervasive family-oriented traditions of the Chinese favor a government hostile to crime and corruption. Familism also amplifies the shaming effect of offending because it is shared by the entire family. Confucianism also privileged order over

individual rights and thus promotes comunitarianism where emphasis is on collective interests.

On average the HK government spends one-tenth of its public expenditure on security. The police force has long been equipped with extensive powers of ‘stop and search’ since the colonial period, and it is one of the largest police forces deployed. The decolonization and re-legitimization of the HK police force was achieved by implementing the community-policing model, one that also led to positive increases in the public’s willingness to report crime (Lethbridge 1985; Traver & Vagg 1991; Lo 1993; Gaylord & Traver 1995; Leung 1995). The government also actively promotes anti-corruption measures along with consensus policing styles and this led to the dissolution of the symbiotic relationship between police and triads (organized criminals) observed during the 1950s and 1960s. Also strict gun laws have effectively reduced firearm robbery to fewer than 5 events per year and not a single incident of domestic violence was perpetuated with a firearm in the past five years. The successful suppression of cross-border crime by way of mandatory Identity Cards and coordinated efforts with the Public Security Bureau PRC has significant impact on a small-enclosed jurisdiction like HK. Punishment is also generally severe in either side of the border, as reflected by the high incarceration rate in HK and the death penalty in PRC.

The densely populated nature of urban high rise living also provides higher levels of natural or informal surveillance by facilitating the presence of capable guardians and reduces opportunity for crime. The availability of attractive wealthy targets within the city has a limited stimulus on crime opportunity due to the large numbers of private security officers employed.²² In addition advanced crime prevention technologies including CCTV are installed in public housing, public recreational areas and crime hot spots and these serve to reduce a potential offenders’ willingness to commit crime.

Various measures that attempted to bring the public and state together in fighting crime have been successfully implemented since the late 1960s. The continual localization and professionalisation of the HKP also overcame the challenge caused by the rising proportion of at-risk youths during the 1970s and the cross-border crime wave that struck in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Fight Crime Committee and the HK Police work closely with the public to develop programmes that aim at reducing youth offending and recidivism. District Fight Crime Committees proactively coordinate the local community’s effort against crime and retain their potency as a means for mobilizing public responses to crime.

HK service-oriented policing, however, faces new challenges. The challenges are not only about the threat of transnational crime and traditional crime and its evolution in cyberspace, but in the demand for proactive action on domestic violence – were the would-be guardians may be the perpetrators. This requires balancing the role of state intervention in family disputes with heightened respect for civil rights while at the same time insuring social services and police collaborate. However, with an aging population more attention will be needed to curb the growing incidences of crime against elderly.

²² Approximately 130,000 people are registered security providers (1872 per 100,000 if in work) – mostly employed in guarding services.

The low crime rate observed in HK is a result of a complicated mixture of cultural traditions, pro-active crime prevention and the emergence of a legitimate 'consensus' style of law enforcement. Thus family-oriented Confucianist values, a large professionalized and localized police force that focuses on a client-services approach, strict gun laws, successful co-operative suppression of cross-border crime, high levels of formal or informal supervision, proactive efforts against organized crime and corruption and severe punishment for the convicted all serve to reduce opportunity for crime.

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