

SUMMARY

CRIME TRENDS IN FINLAND

The societal changes in Finland during the last decades are reflected in the statistics on recorded crime. Recorded crime in general increased during the 1960s and the 1970s due to rapid urbanization and as the large post-war age cohorts reached a crime-intensive age. The surge in recorded crime was followed by a period of more stable trends. During the 1980s there were new increases in some categories of recorded crime. In the early 1990s, together with the economic recession, major property crime categories stabilized and like thefts, even began to decrease. In the 2000s changes in crime figures are small.

Homicide 1995–2004. In 2004, there were altogether 144 homicides (excl. attempts) reported to the police. The annual number of police-recorded homicides has varied between 100 and 155 during the last ten years. In 2004, the annual homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 2.7 (identical with the ten-year-average). Additionally, Finnish law distinguishes assaults resulting in death and infanticides. In the past ten-year period, the number of assaults resulting in death has varied between 21 and 33 (28 in 2004). The annual number of infanticides has varied between 0 and 3 (none in 2004). The total number of homicides, infanticides and assaults resulting in death was 172 in 2004, slightly higher than the ten-year average (168). The total rate per 100,000 inhabitants of all lethal intentional violent crimes reported to the police was 3.3 in 2004.

Homicides typically take place between middle aged, unemployed, alcoholized males from the lowest social stratum. The typical conflict type leading to lethal outcome is a drinking group quarrel between friends or acquaintances. The economically deprived areas of eastern and northern Finland are over-represented in the homicide statistics.

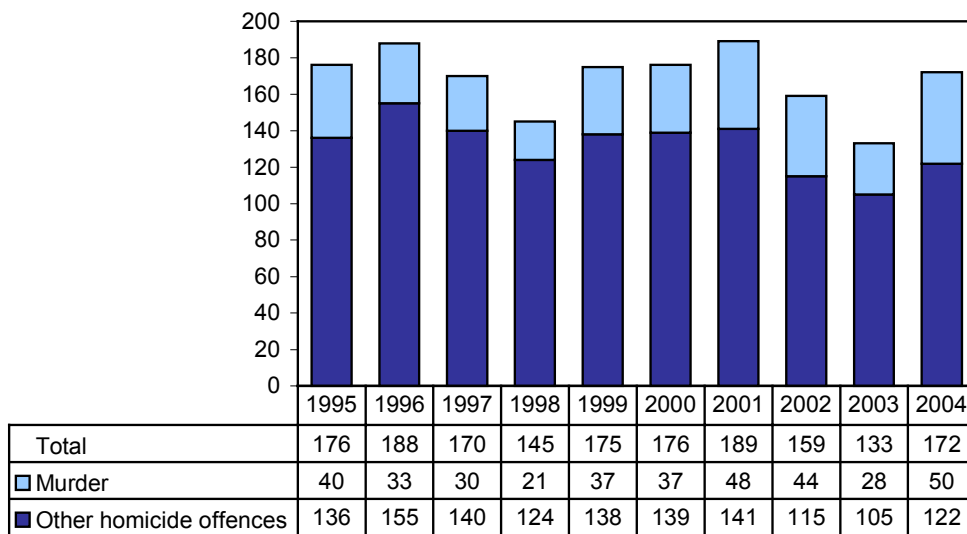


Figure 1 Homicide offences recorded by the police, 1995–2004

The following crime categories are included: murder, manslaughter, killing (*surma*), infanticide, and assault resulting in death.

Assaults and attempted homicides 1995–2004. In 2004 there were altogether 29,806 assault offences and 334 attempted homicides reported to the police. The recorded number of non-fatal assault offences increased in the mid-1990s about 30 percent, but during the last few years the number has been again quite stable. The increase of the 1990s was rather due to technical redefinitions of assault offences and police campaigns aimed at improving the security of public places, than an increase of violent incidents on the field-level. This is confirmed by large-scale victimisation surveys that indicate that the annual percentage of adults who have experienced violence resulting in physical injury has been very stable (about 2 percent) during the last 20 years. Apart from definition and control action influences, the number of assaults has been roughly paralleled by changes in alcohol consumption and economic affluence. – Recorded rates of assault offences are highest in the most urbanized regions. This is true also of violence measured by victimisation surveys.

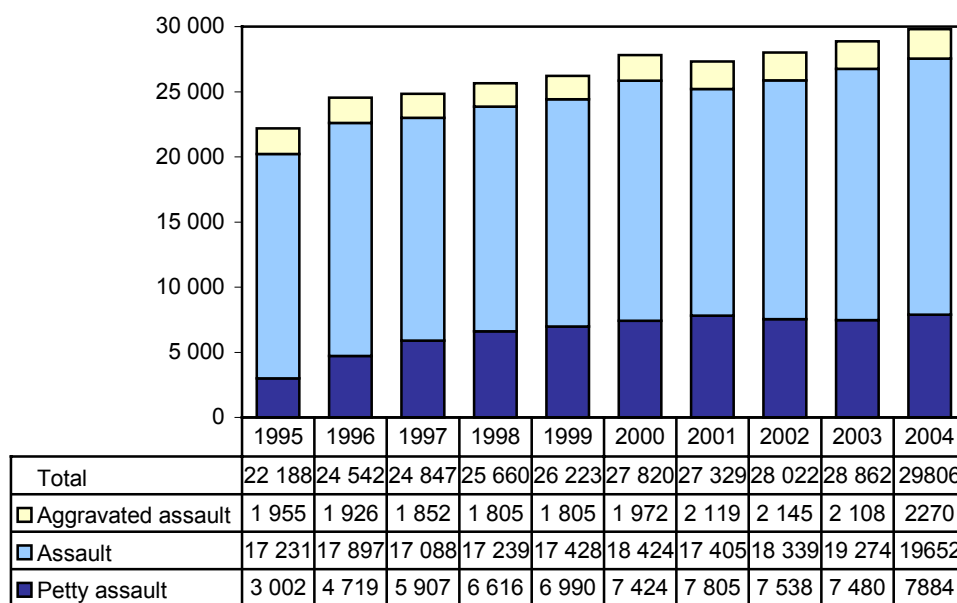


Figure 2 Assaults recorded by the police, 1995–2004

Robberies 1995–2004. Recorded robberies jumped upwards at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s. In the mid 1990s, their number dropped back to an annual level of about 2,000 offences. In 2004 the number of recorded robberies was 2,017, which was slightly less than the ten-year average (2,171). The number of bank or post office robberies increased in the late 1980s, peaking in 1992 (116 incidents). Subsequently, their number was halved after the introduction of systematic countermeasures. In 2002 (the most recent year with available data) only 19 bank or post office robberies were reported to the police. – Recorded rates of robberies are highest in the most urbanized regions and about half of the perpetrators are under 21 years of age.

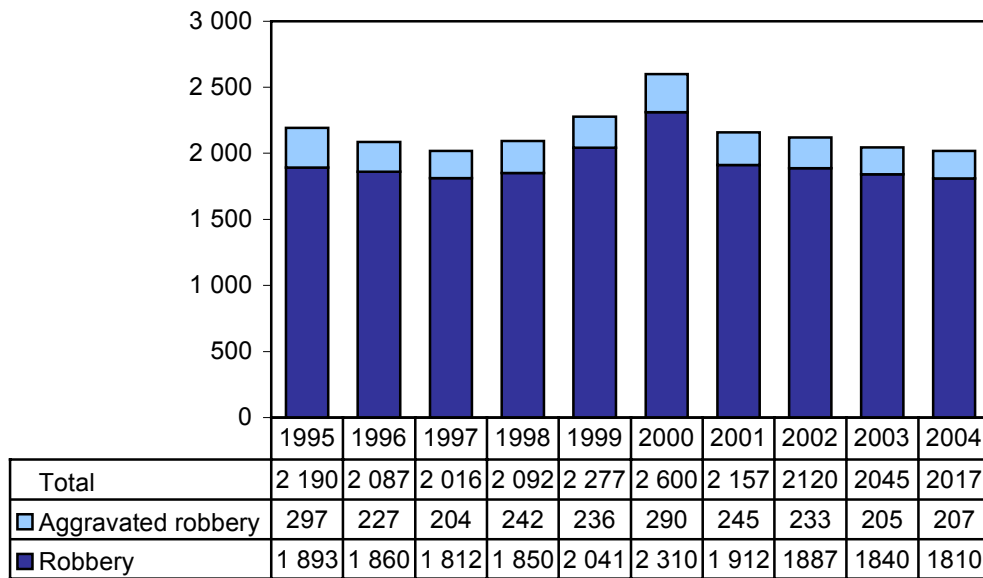


Figure 3 Robberies recorded by the police, 1995–2004

Sex offences 1995–2004. Reported forcible rapes display an increasing trend from 1995, likely to reflect, in the first place, an increasing reportability of such offences. The number of forcible rapes increased 3 % in 2004 compared with foregoing year.

Recorded numbers of sexual offences against children and minors fluctuates annually relatively much, reflecting the probably very large proportion of hidden crime in this event type and incoherent recording practises of serial crimes. Over time, the reportability of these offences is likely to have increased. According to police and court statistics the number of sexual offences against children has increased in recent years.

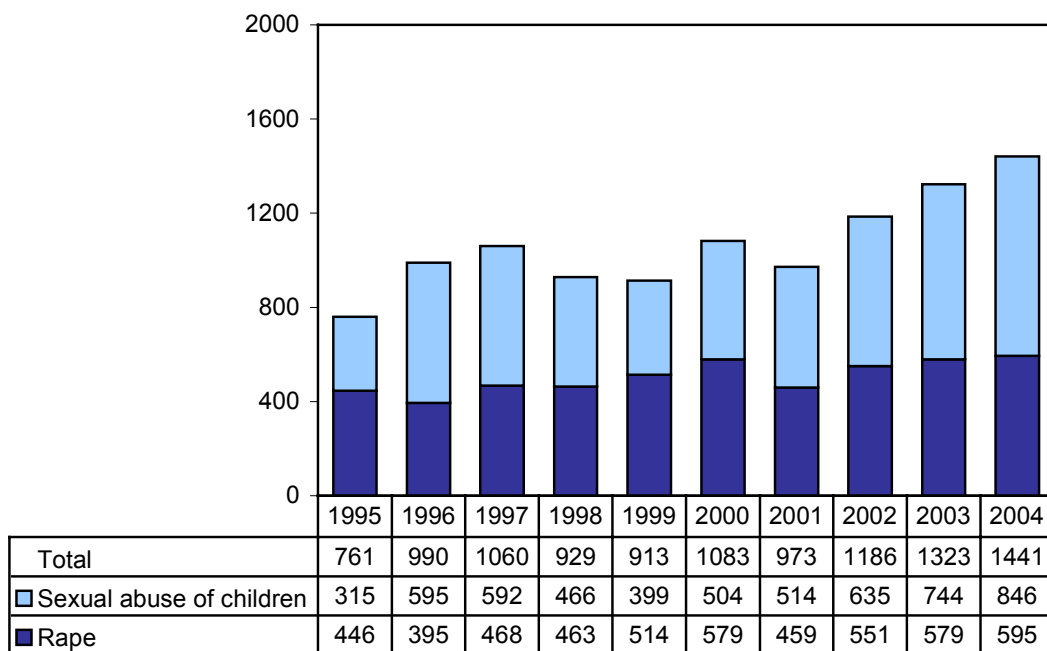


Figure 4 Rapes and sexual offences against children recorded by the police, 1995–2004

Thefts 1995–2004. The increase in recorded thefts that was apparent during the 1980s levelled off in the early 1990s. In the 2000s there has been a downward trend in the number of thefts. Large victimisation surveys also indicate a decrease in thefts after the mid 1990s. In 2004 the police recorded in total 164,000 crimes of theft or 3,100 crimes per 100,000 in population. There was an eight percent decrease from the previous year.

Changes in the level of theft offenses appear to be connected with the economic development of society. Periods of economic upswings have often been followed by an above-average increase in recorded theft. – The rates of theft offences or crimes per population are highest in the most urbanized regions.

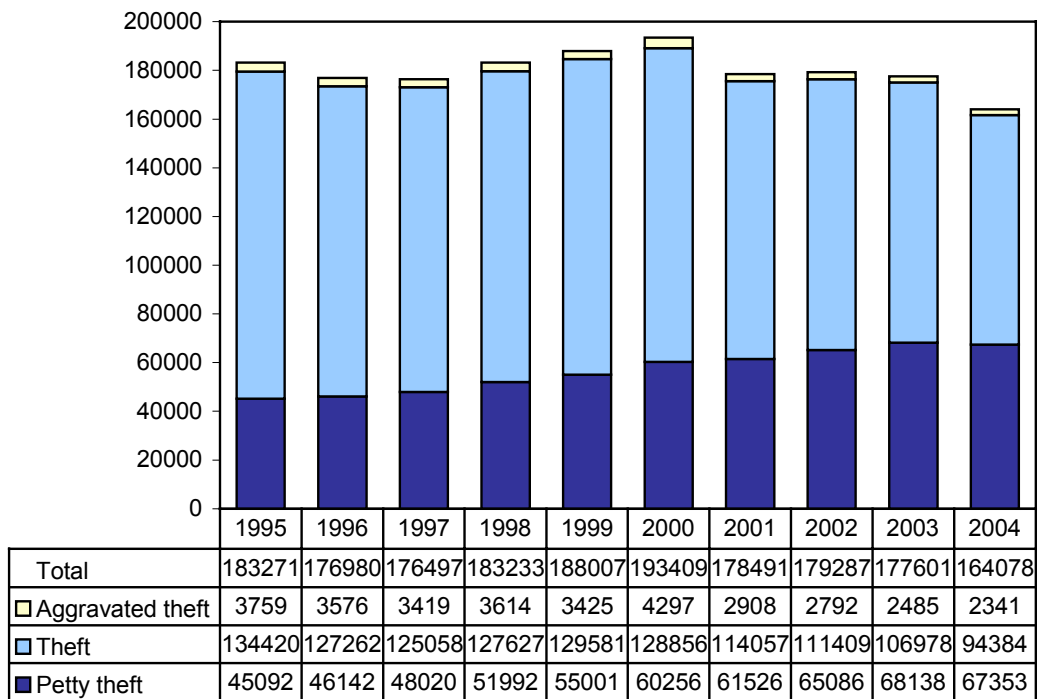


Figure 5 Thefts recorded by the police, 1995–2004

Thefts of motor vehicles 1995–2004. Recorded thefts of motor vehicles, majority of which are car thefts, increased in the 1980s, with a subsequent decline beginning in 1993, in line with other theft. The crime figures began to increase again in 1996 and the upward trend continued until the end of 1990s. In 2000–2004 there has been a clear break in this development as the number of crimes has decreased by 27 per cent. According to the International Crime Victim Surveys, Finland scores below the European average in the frequency of car thefts. – In the 1990s and 2000s the crime rate, or the number of thefts of motor vehicles per 1,000 cars and motorcycles, has fluctuated between 7 and 12 (absolute figure in 2004: 19,292).

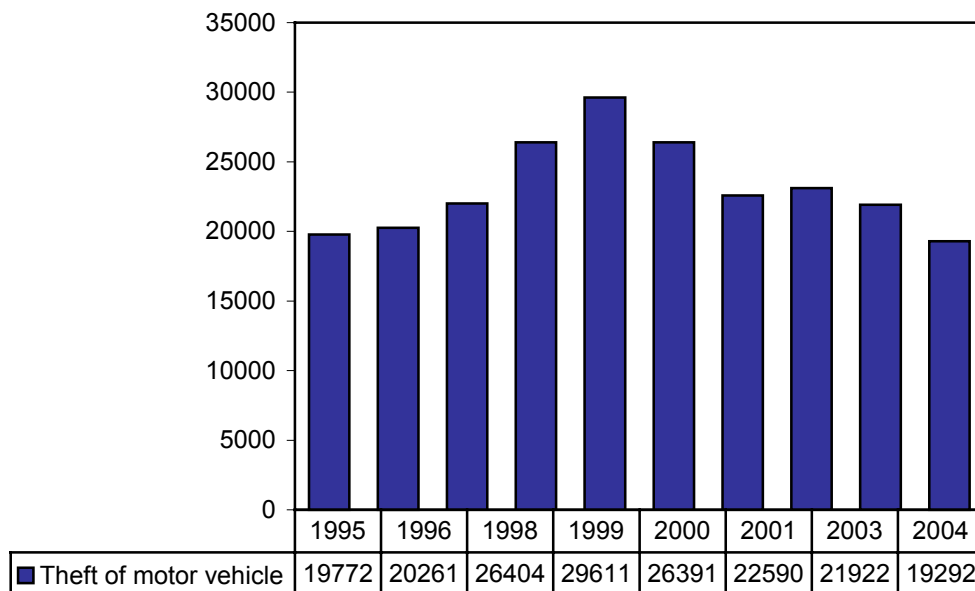


Figure 6 Thefts of motor vehicles recorded by the police, 1995–2004

Embezzlement 1995–2004. The number of embezzlements recorded by the police shows a rather stable downward trend in the 1990s. In the last years there have been again some increases in the number of these crimes. However, the number of embezzlement is quite small, in 2004 68 crimes per 100,000 in population (absolute figure 3,571). Since 1991, in case of series of embezzlements, each series is counted as one offence which has considerably reduced the annual variation in the crime figures.

Fraud 1995–2004. Recorded frauds increased steeply during the 1980s following the rapid introduction of credit cards. During the early 1990s, presumably because of the tightened controls in the granting of credit and credit cards, the number of recorded frauds decreased considerably. Part of the decrease is also due to the new counting rule of serial frauds – the same applied for embezzlement. In the late 1990s and in the beginning of the 2000s the number of annually recorded credit card frauds has been quite stable. In 2004 the police recorded 65 credit card frauds and 219 other frauds per 100,000 in population (absolute figures 3,387 and 11,461). The rates of fraud by the population size of the region follow the same pattern as the rates of theft and embezzlement. They are clearly higher in big cities than in rural regions.

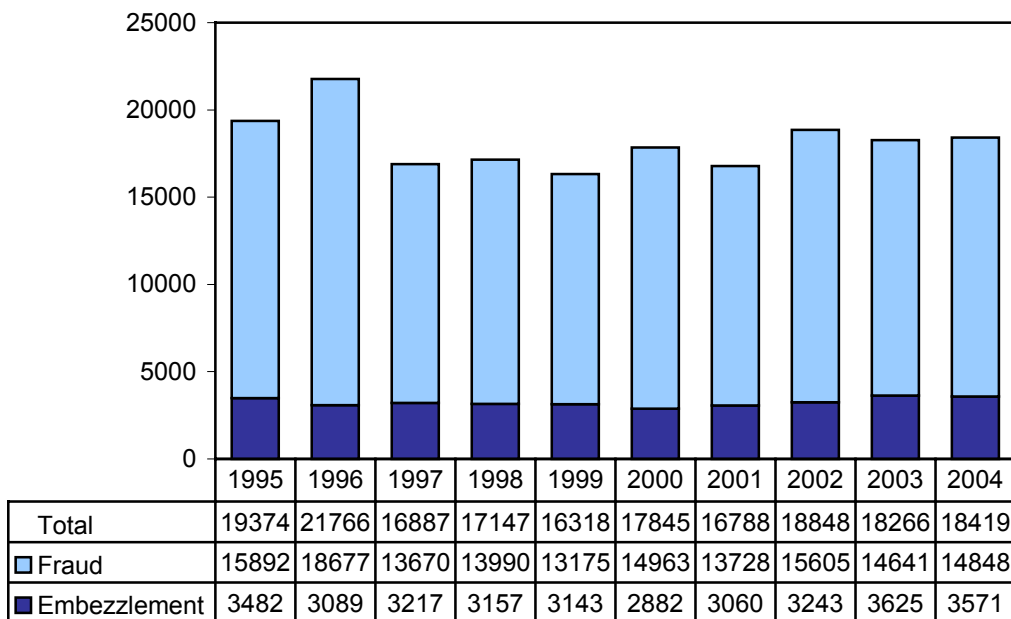


Figure 7 Frauds and embezzlements recorded by the police, 1995–2004

Damage to property 1995–2004. Offences of damage to property constitute 13 percent of police-recorded crimes against the penal code. After two years of decrease, there was a 4 percent upward turn in the number of vandalism in both 2003 and 2004. In 2004 the police recorded 954 crimes per 100,000 in population (absolute figure 49,970). Several cities have organized special projects against graffiti, which have reduced the number of unwanted painting and increased the number of caught taggers. The International Crime Victimization Survey has found Finland to be below the European average in rates of victimization to crimes of damage to vehicles. Between 3.7 and 5.6 percent of subjects responded that their car had been damaged during the previous 12 months.

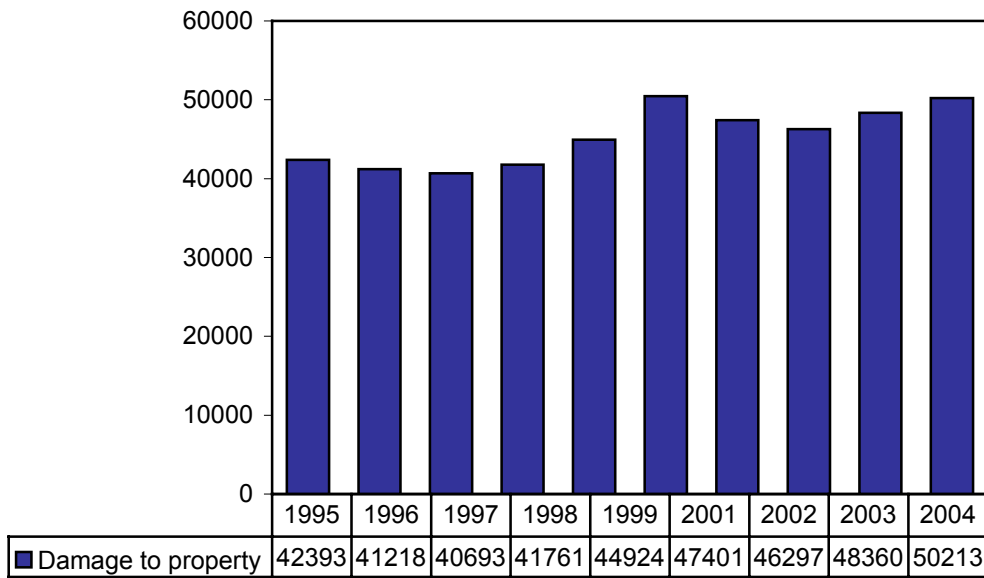


Figure 8 Offences of damage to property recorded by the police, 1995–2004

Tax offences and economic offences. There has been expressed a significant concern in Finland over economic crimes such as bankruptcy offences, accounting offences and tax fraud. In 2004 the police recorded altogether 2,393 offences of this kind, which was about three percent more than the year before.

The changes in the level of control have a substantial impact on the annual changes in the number of recorded economic crimes in Finland. Still, the overall decreasing trend of recorded economic crimes since the depression years of the early 1990s (their numbers have decreased about 15 percent since the mid-1990s) can also be partly due to diminishing volume of actual economic crime.

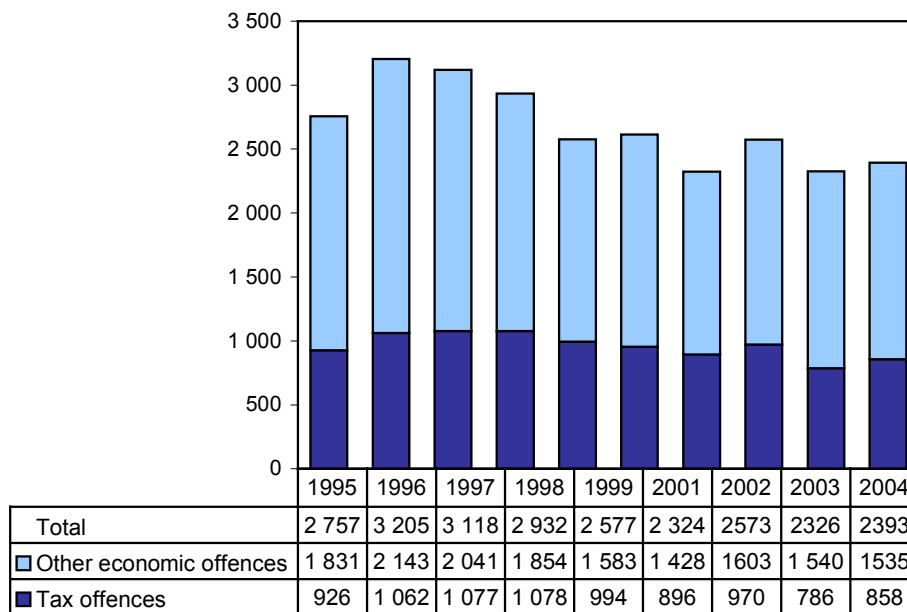


Figure 9 Tax offences and other economic offences recorded by the police, 1995–2004

Drunken driving 1995–2004. For recorded cases of drunken driving, the last ten years represent a rather stable period, with a decline between 1991 and 1994, likely to be largely explained by the economic recession which affected both traffic volumes and alcohol consumption. The number of drunken driving increased 10 per cent in 2004 compared with foregoing year. The increase in 2003–2004 was mostly caused by the change of law concerning driving under the influence of drugs. The law stated a zero limit for drug driving. In the measurements of random roadside checks, the proportion of drivers with a blood alcohol content of 0.05 % or higher has been about 0.2 per cent in last ten years. In international perspectives these rates are very low. – The rates of drunken driving offences are highest in the less urbanized regions.

Other traffic offences 1995–2004. The general trend of other traffic offenses has been decreasing over the 1990s and in the beginning of 2000s, when assessed in proportion to the number of registered motor vehicles. The number of traffic offences increased 8 per cent in 2004 compared with the foregoing year. If the number of traffic fatalities and injuries in traffic is used as an indicator, also traffic safety has clearly improved: the annual number of fatalities has decreased from a high of 1,156 in 1972 to an average, during the 1980s, of about 550, and has continued to fall. The most recent data is from 2004, when 375 fatalities in traffic were recorded. – The rates of these offences are highest in the less urbanized regions, even if related to the number of motor vehicles.

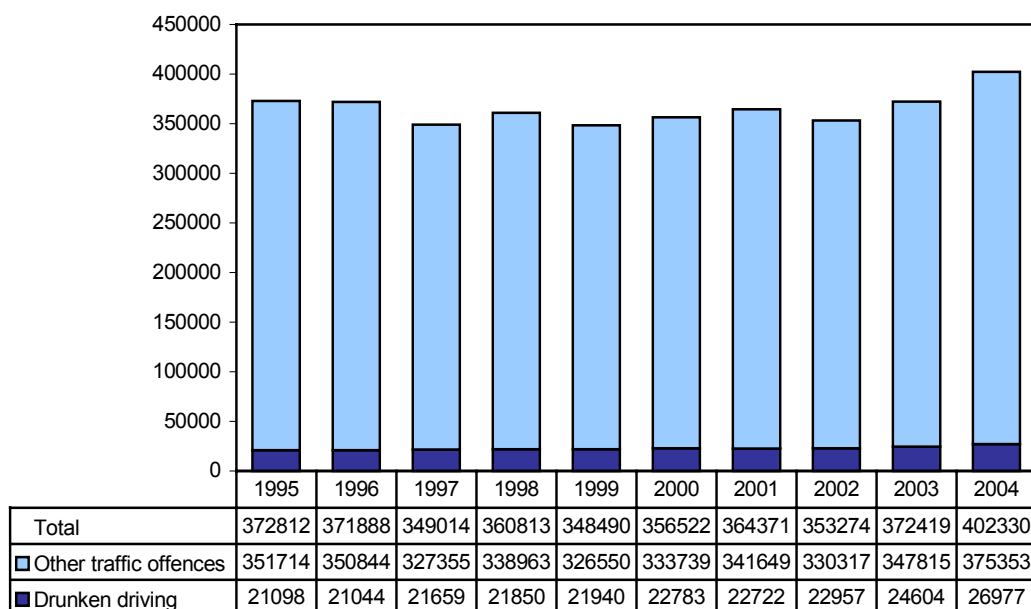


Figure 10 Drunken driving and other traffic offences recorded by the police, 1995–2004

Narcotics offences 1995–2004. Use and possession of drugs for personal use are considered to be crimes in Finland. In fact, the majority of sentences imposed for narcotics concern these crimes. The principal drugs are cannabis and amphetamine. After a period of major growth during the 1990s, the drug market in Finland appears to have stabilized.

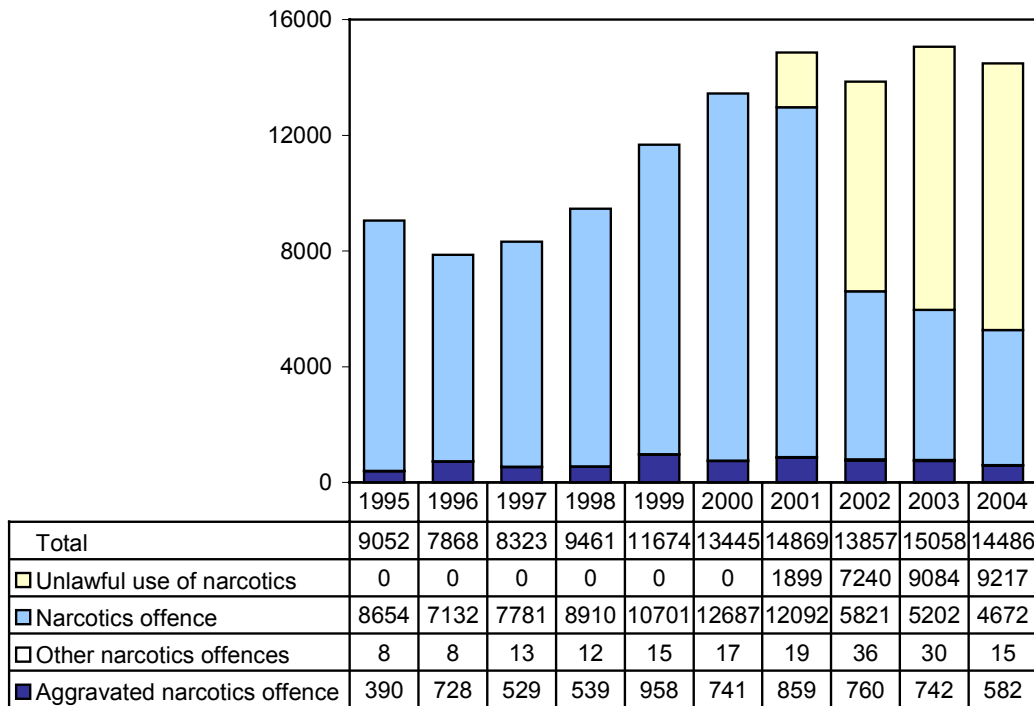


Figure 11 Narcotics offences recorded by the police, 1995–2004

Juvenile crime. The numbers of juveniles suspected of crimes against the Penal Code has been relatively stable in the last two decades. Their proportion out of all persons suspected of these crimes has slowly decreased.

The rate of juvenile theft offences decreased in the 1990s. This is so especially in the age bracket 15–17 years. The rates of assaults committed by juveniles increased at the same time, particularly after 1995 when assaults were redefined in the Penal Code reform. After 2000, the assault rate of 15–17 year olds has decreased slightly while the rate of recorded assaults in the age bracket 18–20 increased.

Typical juvenile offences (with high proportions of young suspects) are status offences related to alcohol possession and identity documents. Beyond these, car thefts, damage to property and robberies have unusually high proportions (19–28 %) of juvenile suspects (less than 18 years old). Also thefts and assaults have relatively high percentages (12–18 %) of juvenile perpetrators.

The involvement of juveniles as perpetrators of lethal violence is rare. The number of homicides committed by persons aged less than 18 years increased in the period 1999–2002 (peaking in 13 offences in 2002), after which the number returned to a very low level (0 in 2003 and 2 in 2004).

Women as perpetrators and victims of violence. In year 2004 16 % of all the persons suspected by the police of crime were women. The women's share was the highest (25 to 30 %) in certain property crimes like shoplifting and embezzlement, and the lowest in crimes like drunken driving and vandalism (one tenth or less of the suspects were women). In year 2003 29 women got killed in Finland; 13 of them were killed by their partners. The amount of women killed per year has varied between 29 and 53 per year during the last 10 years. Women experience violence in their intimate relationships more often compared to men. In year 2003 one in ten of the violence cases reported to the police was categorised family "violence". Victims were women in 80 % of these cases. Furthermore, a study on aggravated assaults reported to the police in 1998 revealed that most of the women had been assaulted by their partners or family members. According to the most recent general victimisation survey conducted in Finland women experience violence as often as men. Women's experiences are more prevalent at work and at home compared to those of men.

Foreigners and crime. In 2004, about 17 300 foreigners who had residence in Finland, were suspected of some offence. This rate was 2.7 % out of all persons suspected of offences known to the police in Finland. The number of offences committed by foreigners has increased 60 % since 1996. In 2004, about 108 000 foreigners had residence in Finland. In addition about 14 900 foreigners not having residence in Finland, tourists and other visitors were suspected of offences in 2004.

26 per cent of all foreigners suspected of crimes were Russians, 11 per cent were Estonians, and 9 per cent were Swedes. Foreigners were most typically suspected of traffic offences (46 % in 2004). Forcible rapes, other sexual offences and robberies were offences where foreign suspects were most clearly over-represented in 2004 (forcible rapes 16 per cent, other sexual offences 12 per cent and robberies 11 per cent of all suspects).

Of all foreigners sentenced to imprisonment in 2004, almost one-third (29 %) were Estonians, and about one-fourth (23 %) were Russians. The number of foreigners in Finnish prisons has been increasing rapidly in last ten years, from about one per cent to 8–9 per cent (2004) of the average daily

prison population. Foreigner participation in the growing narcotics markets is a central factor in this development.

Studies of foreigners as crime victims indicate that they commonly suffer from many varieties of discrimination, including attacks of racist violence. Persons with a Somalian origin were particularly often exposed to such events. Also persons with an Arabic or Turkish background had experienced discrimination and racist violence more frequently than other foreigner groups.

Fear of crime. Large national population surveys measuring victimisation and fear of crime indicate that concern/fear of street crimes has decreased in 2003 compared with 1990s. Concern for one's home being burglarized has also slightly decreased after a clear increase between 1988 and 1993. In international comparison there was least concern about burglary in Finland and other Scandinavian countries according to the 2000 international crime victims survey. Also feelings of vulnerability on the streets at night were one of the lowest in Finland, Sweden and Denmark based on the international victimisation survey and the Eurobarometer of public safety.

The popularity of burglary protection by various methods has grown clearly since 1988 but not afterwards. Security precautions (for examples self-defence education) against violence have increased continuously during the last 15 years.

The role of alcohol is marked in Finnish criminality, especially in crimes of violence. Indeed, one explanation given for the relatively high level of violence in Finland is the drinking culture characterised by heavy and intoxication-oriented drinking patterns.

In the period 2000–2004, 64 per cent of homicide offenders were recorded as having committed the offence under the influence of alcohol. In assault offences, the corresponding figure was 70 per cent. In robbery offences, only 44 per cent of the offenders were under the influence of alcohol during the offence. In all violent offences, the proportion of offenders who were under the influence of drugs is slowly increasing. Especially robbery offences are increasingly committed under the influence of drugs. However, alcohol intoxication is by far more prevalent in all types of violent crime incidents.

The role of alcohol appears also on macro level or as a connection between the overall consumption of alcohol and violence. In a Finnish time series study covering the time period 1950–2000 it has been estimated that a one litre increase in annual per capita alcohol consumption (100 % alcohol) corresponds to a 3 to 6 percent increase in the assault rate (Sirén 2002).