

Law and order situation in first half of 2024

1. Overall situation

In the first half of 2024, a total of 45 315 crimes were recorded in Hong Kong, representing an increase of 5.6% (+2 392 cases) compared with the same period last year. The overall detection rate was 26.3%. Leaving deception cases aside, the detection rate was 44%. There were 5 156 cases of violent crime, registering an increase of 8.3% (+397 cases) compared with the same period last year. Major crimes that recorded increases included deception, theft, blackmail and burglary.

2. Deception

A total of 19 897 cases of deception were registered in the first half of 2024, an increase of 1 154 cases (+6.2%) compared with the same period last year (18 743 cases), of which 62.3% were Internet-related. Deception cases accounted for 43.9% of the total number of crimes and the amount involved was \$4.48 billion (+1.79 billion, +66.5%). The loss incurred from investment fraud was \$1.55 billion, accounting for 34.5% of the total amount involved.

Compared with the respective increases of 52.1% (in the first half of 2023 compared to the same period of 2022) and 41.7% (in the first half of 2022 compared to the same period of 2021) in the corresponding periods of the past two years, the increase of deception cases in the first half of this year (+6.2%) has slowed down. Police have put vigorous efforts into combatting deception in recent years, and launched various measures for raising public awareness. Scammers also change their modus operandi from time to time. For example, "Guess Who" became less adopted by scammers in telephone deception, resulting in a significant drop in this type of deception from 1 224 cases to 475 cases (-61.2%). However, the new modus operandi of scammers "impersonating customer service staff of e-shopping platforms, online payment platforms, and telecommunications companies" has emerged this year. A total of 1 605 cases were already reported in the first half of this year, leading to the rise in the overall number of deception cases.

Scammers would pretend to be customer service staff of e-shopping platforms, online payment platforms or telecommunications companies and claim that victims have subscribed to their paid services. When victims deny such subscription, the fake customer service staff would claim to assist in cancelling the services, and transfer the calls to fake bank staff who would in turn lure victims into surrendering their e-banking usernames, passcodes and verification codes, so as to steal money from their accounts; or the scammers would lure victims into making transactions to designated bank accounts. Deception cases of such kind underwent another surge in July, recording a total of 1 111 cases in that single month, accumulating up to 2 716 cases for the first seven months of 2024, which is even higher than the

increase of overall deception cases (+ 2 609 cases).

In response to the emergence of such new modus operandi of telephone deception, Police have liaised with the companies concerned to further widen the reach of anti-deception messages. Apart from posting anti-deception messages in their stores, websites and mobile applications, large-scale advertisements have been put up on the bodies of more than 120 trucks of a major logistics company starting from this month to help Police get the anti-deception messages across to various districts of the territory during the delivery of goods.

Other scams employing new modus operandi include the "secondary scams" perpetrated by fraudsters posing as lawyers and falsely claiming to help victims of deception cases recover their losses, as well as computer operating system or anti-virus software technical support scams. Although the number of such cases is not high at present, Police will closely monitor the trend and have immediately disseminated information on such new modus operandi to members of the public through various channels, such as press conferences, "CyberDefender" website, social media, "Scameter+" and so on, so as to remind them to stay vigilant.

In fact, fraud syndicates constantly modify their modus operandi to maximise their proceeds and this phenomenon does pose huge challenges to police forces around the world. The Hong Kong Police Force does not want to be in a passive position of "fighting a new trick only when it emerges". Recognising that combating deception requires the concerted efforts of all sectors of the community, Police have been working with various stakeholders over the past few years to proactively fortify defences against deception in terms of mechanism and public awareness in the following major areas:

i. Multiple measures have been rolled out in collaboration with the banking industry, including the launch of the "Faster Payment System Suspicious Proxy ID Alert" in November last year. As at the end of June this year, around 655 000 alerts have been issued. Starting from August 4, the mechanism has been extended to cover the transactions conducted by teller counters in bank branches and e-banking. When members of the public make transfers through these two channels to the accounts which have been labelled as suspicious by "Scameter+", they will receive automated alerts from bank staff and online banking platform respectively, reminding them not to make such transfers. With the expansion of this mechanism, the transaction coverage rate has been significantly increased from 35% to 84%. It is expected that the mechanism will reach 100% coverage upon further extension to automated teller machines by the end of this year, enabling full protection for members of the public.

Additionally, since the establishment of the Anti-Deception Alliance (ADA), jointly operated by Police and 10 major banks, in late November last year, it has continued to enhance the efficiency of intercepting fraudulent payments and expedite the identification of potential fraud victims. As at the end of June this year, 807 persons have been successfully dissuaded from continuing to transfer money to fraudsters, while over 95% of the fraudulent payment interception requests have been responded by banks within two hours.

In June this year, the efforts of the ADA were effective in successfully intercepting fraudulent payments totalling \$107 million in two cases, including the entire amount of loss totalling over \$40 million in one particular case, which was a notable result.

ii. A number of initiatives have also been implemented in conjunction with the telecommunications industry, including the blocking of telephone numbers and websites involved in deception cases by telecommunications service providers upon request. As at the end of June this year, around 12 200 website links and 6 500 telephone numbers have been intercepted.

iii. Upon the implementation of "Scameter" and "Scameter+", as at the end of June this year, the two search engines have recorded 3.97 million searches and issued approximately 620 000 alerts on frauds and cyber security risks. "Scameter+" was upgraded in February this year. With new functions to issue alerts and a new public reporting platform, "Scameter+" has been downloaded 493 000 times, registering an increase of nearly 90%. Members of the public have even reported a total of over 123 000 suspicious calls and 12 000 suspicious websites in four months, a daily average of about 970 suspicious calls and 97 suspicious websites respectively.

iv. Police will continue to strengthen anti-deception publicity and education to boost the overall immunity of members of the public against deception, so that not only can they stay vigilant to the old modus operandi of scams, but they will also be able to protect themselves from falling prey to the latest scams when they emerge. To widen the reach of anti-deception publicity, Police have enlisted the assistance of different government departments, regulators and enterprises to disseminate messages against deception on various fronts and through different channels. For example, the Water Supplies Department will add a QR Code for downloading "Scameter+" to the quarterly water bill envelopes starting from October to January next year, covering all users in Hong Kong.

At present, five major catering groups have already printed anti-deception messages on their tray liners, cup sleeves and coupons. Police are also liaising with five major catering industry associations to seek the assistance of their members in disseminating anti-deception messages through various channels. Also, starting from May, an "anti-scam promotional truck" arranged by Police has been reaching out to various districts in the territory and will stay in service for a year. Members of the public can learn about the latest modus operandi of scams through interactive games and are encouraged to download "Scameter+". Additionally, Police are organising "Anti-Deception Month" and "Anti-Money Laundering Month" in August again with the aim of conveying anti-deception messages to every household by linking them to the daily life of the public through various channels.

As for enforcement, a total of 5 693 persons were arrested for involving in various types of deception cases and related money laundering offences in the first half of this year, representing an increase of 40% over the same period last year. Among them, more than 4 000 persons were stooge account holders. Apart from expediting prosecution, Police will also apply to the court for enhanced sentencing. As of June 2024, Police succeeded in

enhancing the sentence of 11 stooge account holders in nine cases by three to 12 months, resulting in 26 to 75 months of imprisonment.

In addition, Police had mounted joint operations with Mainland law enforcement agencies against laundering of crime proceeds and receiving of fraudulent payments with stooge accounts between May and July. A total of 244 persons were arrested in Hong Kong and on the Mainland, of whom 220 were arrested on the Mainland and some 20 were suspected of recruiting and arranging Mainlanders to come to Hong Kong for setting up stooge accounts. Police in both places will strengthen their efforts in combatting this type of crime.

Although the rise in deception cases in the first half of this year has slowed down compared with the same periods of the previous two years, the number of cases is still high and the loss amount involved is substantial. Police will continue to step up efforts to combat deception on various fronts, and appeal to members of the public to bring anti-deception messages to their family and friends.

3. Homicide

A total of 11 cases of homicide were recorded, a drop of five cases (-31.3%) compared with the same period last year. Four of the cases involved family violence, while the other seven involved disputes among friends, dangerous driving causing death involving drug trafficking, a case that happened at a construction site on Anderson Road in September 2022 resulting in three deaths, psychiatric problems and monetary disputes respectively. All of them have been detected.

4. Wounding and serious assault

There were 1 821 cases of wounding and serious assault, registering a slight increase of 1.4% (+25 cases) over the same period last year. Among them, 9.3% of the cases were triad-related.

Regarding the closed-circuit television (CCTV) installation scheme for the purpose of effective combat against various types of crimes, including wounding cases, Police completed the installation of CCTV cameras at 15 locations of Mong Kok in April for testing the technicality. Since June, Police have also started to install other CCTV cameras in phases, with a target of installing a total of 615 sets in various districts within this year. With the assistance of the newly installed CCTV cameras, Police have detected 17 cases involving serious crimes as at July 31, including homicide, robbery, wounding and possession of imitation firearm, and a total of 27 persons have been arrested, showcasing the effectiveness and importance of CCTVs in fighting and preventing crime.

5. Robbery and burglary

There were 44 robbery cases, a drop of 25.4% (-15 cases) over the same period last year. The detection rate was 84.1% (+12.9 percentage points, 37 cases detected), hitting a record high since the statistics of the first-

half-year detection rate of robbery had been maintained in 1977.

A total of 684 burglary cases were recorded, a rise of 112 cases (+19.6%) over the same period last year. The rise was attributed to the increase in the number of cases involving residential premises (503 cases, +114 cases, +29.3%), of which a larger increase was observed in the number of cases occurring in village houses (176 cases, +89 cases, +102.3%). The increase in the number of burglary cases involving residential premises was believed to be the result of a significant rise in the number of people travelling abroad compared to the same period last year (an increase of 72.4% in the first half of 2024 compared with the same period last year), leaving homes unattended for burglars to prey on.

Police have stepped up anti-burglary patrols, especially in areas with more village houses, and made good use of technology, such as drones, and partnered with the Government Flying Service to carry out air patrol and assist in searching for suspects in remote hilly areas. The intelligence-led enforcement actions of Police have also been effective, with 196 arrests made in the first half of this year, an increase of 33.3% (+49 persons) over the same period last year. In fact, the increase in burglary cases has slowed down in recent months, and the figure for June even saw a significant drop of 45.2% (-66 cases) compared with May.

6. Theft

There were 11 529 theft cases, an increase of 3.9 % (+437 cases) compared with the same period last year. The rise was attributed to the increase in shop theft (4 415 cases, +476 cases, +12.1%), miscellaneous theft (6 125 cases, +138 cases, +2.3%) and pickpocketing (287 cases, +59 cases, +25.9%).

In view of the increase in the number of shop theft cases, Police held a press conference in mid-July to explain the situation, urging members of the public not to commit the offence out of momentary greed and appealing to shop owners to step up anti-theft measures with the aid of technology (e.g. anti-theft tags, etc.).

7. Blackmail

In the first half of 2024, there were 1 418 cases of blackmail, an increase of 325 cases (+29.7%). The rise was mostly attributed to "naked chat", which is both a technology and a violent crime, totalling 1 102 cases and registering an increase of 269 cases (+32.3%). Students remained as the largest group of victims.

8. Sexual offences

There were 33 rape cases, an increase of 12 cases (+57.1%), and none of them involved strangers. The larger increase was due to the relatively low number of cases recorded in the same period last year, but the figure was similar to the average number of cases (31 cases) in the first half of the five years before the pandemic (i.e. 2015-2019).

A total of 568 indecent assault cases were recorded, a slight increase of 0.5% (+3 cases). Nearly 60% of the cases occurred in public places and MTR premises. The detection rate was 74.6%.

9. Serious drug offences

There were 577 serious drug cases, a decrease of 2.5% (-15 cases) over the same period last year. The number of youths arrested in connection with serious drug cases has dropped by 32.3% (-32 persons) to 67 persons, of whom 17 persons were local students (-8 persons, -32%).

Police continue to promote anti-drug messages among youngsters and students, including the establishment of the Leadership Institute on Narcotics (L.I.O.N.). With the kicking-off of the third cohort at the beginning of this year, mentees will visit the Mainland in August to exchange experiences with the local students. In April, Police released an anti-drug mini-movie co-produced with the Correctional Services Department, featuring a young girl imprisoned for drug manufacturing, for primary and secondary schools across Hong Kong to show to their students. Also, an all-new drama titled "KOL Interactive Anti-Drug Drama" will be performed in at least 50 primary schools this year. So far, the drama has been performed in 30 primary schools to convey anti-drug messages to campuses and the community on various fronts.

10. Youth crime

In the first half of 2024, a total of 1 541 youths (aged 10 to 20) were arrested for committing criminal offences, similar to the same period last year (+12 persons, +0.8%). The increase was mainly attributed to the rise in deception (288 persons, +71 persons, +32.7%), miscellaneous theft (160 persons, +58 persons, +56.9%) and shop theft (125 persons, +28 persons, +28.9%). However, there was a drop in the number of youths arrested for offences of serious drugs (-32.3%), criminal damage (-22.1%), unlawful society (-39.5%) and so on.

Police hope to cultivate youths' law-abiding awareness together with schools and teachers with their assistance in conveying anti-crime messages to students. From January to April this year, Police collaborated with the Education University of Hong Kong, various school sponsoring bodies and charitable organisation Project WeCan to share information on topics such as digital literacy and anti-drugs information with over 5 000 teaching staff and prospective teachers thus far. A new round of sharing sessions has been arranged with four school sponsoring bodies in the new school year. Police will also continue to publish the "Youth Crime Prevention Booklet" series, providing teaching materials and training on crime prevention for teachers in all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Police are also committed to strengthening communication with youngsters and will co-organise training camps with the Education Bureau. A total of 15 residential camps with each lasting for three days and two nights will be held at the Junior Police Call Permanent Activity Centre from November to June next year, providing training opportunities for more than 2 000

Secondary One students so that they can develop positive values and build up resilience.

11. Enforcement on National Security Law

Since the enactment of the Hong Kong National Security Law, as at June 30 this year, Police have arrested a total of 300 persons. Among them, around 60% have been charged.

12. Conclusion

The overall crime figure in the first half of 2024 registered an increase of 5.6% over the same period last year. A number of major crimes recorded decreases, while most of the increases in other crimes were within a few percentage points. The increase in deception cases has slowed down compared with the past few years. The overall law and order situation was stable.

Apart from fighting and preventing crime, protecting the lives of people is a divine mission of Police. In view of the surge in the number of hikers and the consequent rise in related deaths and injuries over the past few years, Police launched a self-developed smart search and rescue mobile application, HKSOS, in January this year. The application utilises patented Signal Radar technology, which allows for precise positioning even in areas without network coverage, to rescue people, especially hikers, in distress during outdoor activities. As at the end of June, HKSOS has recorded 96 000 downloads and successfully assisted 49 hikers in 21 cases, enhancing the efficiency of rescue operations. During the period, there were only seven cases of prolonged search of four hours or above, representing a significant drop of 86.5% (-45 cases) over the same period last year.

HKSOS and the related rescue solutions have received recognition on the world stage, including the top accolades Gold Medals with the Congratulations of Jury at the International Exhibition of Inventions of Geneva (the 48th and 49th) for two consecutive years since 2023, as well as the Best Use of Advanced Technology Award in the International Critical Communications Awards 2024 held in Dubai in May. Police will continue to enhance digital policing with a view to bringing convenience to the public and safeguarding public safety.