

# Law and order situation in Hong Kong in 2023 (with photos)

## 1. Overall situation

The overall number of crimes reported in 2023 was 90 276 cases, representing an increase of 28.9% when compared with 70 048 cases in 2022. The upsurge was mainly attributed to the increase in deception cases. The overall detection rate was 31.1%. Leaving deception cases aside, the detection rate was 46.2%.

In fact, the overall crime figures in recent years have inevitably been affected by factors such as the "black-clad violence", the COVID-19 epidemic and the surge in deception cases worldwide, which necessitated careful interpretation of the figures.

It was noteworthy that in the first half of 2022 amid the epidemic, a number of traditional crime figures dropped to a particularly low level, some of which even hit a record low. As the society resumed normalcy in 2023, most traditional crimes recorded an increase when compared with 2022, but quite a number of them registered a fairly significant decrease when compared with 2018, the year before the outbreak of the "black-clad violence" and the epidemic.

In 2023, a number of traditional crimes saw a very low figure and a high detection rate over a number of years. Among them, the detection rate of robbery and arson cases even hit a record high of 82.5% and 48.4% respectively, and that of burglary cases reached 37.4%, which was the second highest on record. Some serious crimes of great public concern were swiftly detected by Police.

## 2. Deception

39 824 cases of deception were recorded, representing a rise of 11 901 cases or 42.6% and 31 452 cases (a 3.8-fold increase) when compared with 2022 and 2018 respectively. Among them, around 70% of the reports were Internet-related. The amount involved in deception cases was over \$9 billion.

The prevalent types of deception cases included online shopping scams (8 950 cases, +215 cases, +2.5%), investment fraud (6 330 cases, +3 480 cases, a 1.2-fold increase), phishing scams (4 322 cases, no comparative figures provided as the item has been covered in the scope of statistics compilation since January 2023), employment fraud (3 930 cases, +934 cases, +31.2%), social media deception (3 372 cases, -233 cases, -6.5%), and telephone deception (3 213 cases, +382 cases, +13.5%).

The number of deception cases is on the increase worldwide. With the robust development of information network technology and cross-border consumption and remittances around the globe, many countries and places have

seen a significant rise in deception cases and technology crimes in recent years. To tackle the escalating trend of deception cases, Police sustained their efforts over the past year to step up enforcement, intercept fraudulent payments and adopt the approach of upstream scam intervention to mitigate victims' losses. Police also rolled out multiple anti-deception measures with important stakeholders and supervisory bodies, and continued to raise anti-deception awareness among members of the public through various approaches.

#### Enhancing enforcement efficiency

Considering that deception syndicates had been using a large number of stooge accounts to collect fraudulent payments and launder money, Police stepped up enforcement actions to combat such crimes. Last year, a total of 9 239 persons were arrested for involving in various types of deception cases and committing money laundering offences. Such figure saw an increase of more than 75% when compared with the figure for 2022; and among them, about 6 500 persons were stooge account holders. Police have already reached a consensus with the Department of Justice to enhance the procedures for evidence gathering and prosecution so as to expedite prosecution. Police will also continue to apply to the court for enhanced sentencing. In September last year, Police succeeded in enhancing the sentence of three stooge account holders by 20%, resulting in 26 to 38 months of imprisonment respectively.

#### Provision of anti-deception tools for members of the public

Last year, Police launched various anti-deception tools for use by members of the public. Upon launching a one-stop scam and pitfall search engine "Scameter" in 2022, Police launched a mobile version "Scameter+" in February last year to assist the public in identifying fraud and online pitfalls. So far, the search engine has recorded over 2.13 million searches and issued nearly 360 000 alerts on frauds and cyber security risks.

In November, Police launched the Suspicious Proxy ID Alert in collaboration with 44 banks and stored value facilities operators, so as to link the "Scameter" to the Faster Payment System (FPS) and thus allow the system to issue alerts to members of the public when they would like to make transfers to suspicious accounts. By the end of December, more than 148 000 alerts were issued, covering high-risk transfers amounting to nearly \$180 million. The number of FPS Proxy IDs used for collecting fraudulent payments or money laundering also dropped by 32% from 4 100 in November to 2 800, which was a satisfactory result. However, noting that many members of the public still choose to make transfers after receiving the alerts, Police will work with the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) and the banking industry to explore ways to revise the wording of the alerts and step up publicity, as well as to examine the feasibility of adopting such mechanism in other platforms.

To take a step further, Police will optimise the functions of "Scameter+" in February by incorporating automation elements, which will enable the application to issue alerts when users browse suspicious websites and receive suspicious calls. To further enrich the database of "Scameter", Police will also introduce a public "reporting " mechanism for members of the

public to report suspicious calls or websites through the application.

The Anti-Scam Helpline 18222, operated by the Anti-Deception Coordination Centre (ADCC), continued to play a role in answering public enquiries and minimising the victims' losses, with some 52 000 calls received last year, registering a rise of 37% when compared with 2022. More than \$1.29 billion of fraudulent payments were intercepted in 989 deception cases.

Collaborating with the HKMA and the banking industry

Last year, Police have also collaborated with important stakeholders such as the HKMA and the banking industry in rolling out multiple innovative anti-deception measures: in May, the "Upstream Scam Intervention" scheme was launched with the aim of actively identifying individuals who may be at risk of falling victim to scams, and 654 persons were successfully dissuaded from continuing to transfer money to fraudsters by the end of the year; in November, Police collaborated with 10 major banks in establishing the Anti-Deception Alliance (ADA), where bank representatives are deployed to work in the Police Headquarters to provide more direct and instant communication and assistance in intercepting fraudulent payments and issuing alerts. Since the establishment of the ADA, the average response time of banks in intercepting fraudulent payments significantly reduced by 70%.

Interception at source in collaboration with OFCA and mobile network operators

In September 2022, Police set up a designated working group and launched multiple measures with the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) and mobile network operators so as to intercept deception cases at source. Apart from blocking spoofed calls from outside Hong Kong with the prefix "+852", and sending voice or text alerts to service users when they receive incoming calls originating from outside Hong Kong with caller number prefixed with "+852", mobile network operators blocked or filtered a total of 6 800 websites and nearly 2 500 telephone numbers relating to deception cases upon Police's request, and have been taking the initiative to identify and intercept scam calls on the technical front.

The latest measure also included the "SMS Sender Registration Scheme" launched in December last year. All Registered Senders will use Registered SMS Sender IDs with the prefix "#" to send SMS messages to local subscribers of mobile services. The Scheme will first cover the telecommunications sector, with a view to enabling members of the public to identify scam SMS messages masquerading as mobile network operators. The "Upstream Scam Intervention" scheme under the ADCC has also completed registration, and will send alerts through SMS messages to potential victims with its registered SMS sender ID "#ADCC18222" starting from January 2024.

Upon the launch of various measures, the average number of telephone deception cases in the fourth quarter of 2023 registered a drop of 38.1% when compared with the same period of 2022, highlighting the significance of close cooperation between Police and other stakeholders.

## Publicity and education

Combating deception does not only rely on the publicity and enforcement work done by Police, but also requires the collective efforts from various stakeholders and regulatory bodies, as well as the enhancement of public awareness against fraud. Police continued to disseminate the latest anti-deception messages through online and offline publicity work, including the recent launch of the official "Xiaohongshu" and "Douyin" channels. In June 2023, Police launched "Project SILVERSHIELD" so as to promote the message of "Scams are rampant; Tell everyone" with the aid of community power.

In December last year, Police organised the Anti-Scam Charity Run, which was the first of such kind under the theme of anti-deception and attracted more than 1 700 participants. Recently in January 2024, Police also held the Cyber Defenders' Carnival 2024 at HarbourChill Wan Chai, with a view to raising cyber security awareness. Besides, with due collaborative effort between Police and the Hong Kong Ferry Company Limited, the anti-deception ferry "Ping On" will be in service for a year starting from this week to disseminate anti-deception messages in a new approach. Furthermore, Care Teams of different districts will assist Police in getting the anti-deception messages across to households.

## 3. Homicide

28 cases of homicide were recorded, representing a drop of 2 cases (-6.7%) and 20 cases (-41.7%) when compared with 2022 and 2018 respectively. Nine cases involved domestic or family violence; the remaining 19 cases involved disputes, industrial accidents, psychiatric problems, etc. Only one case was yet to be detected, and Police are making every effort to bring an absconded suspect who had fled Hong Kong on the offence date to justice.

## 4. Wounding and serious assault

There were 3 636 cases of wounding and serious assault. The total figure saw a slight increase of 22 cases (+0.6%) when compared with 2022. The detection rate was 73% (+2.9 percentage points). The upsurge was attributed to the rise in cases involving domestic violence (+92 cases, +13.8%). When compared with 2018, the figure registered a drop of 20.8%, and was even the second lowest on record over the past 50 years. The detection rate was the highest since 1981.

A total of 308 triad-related wounding and serious assault cases were recorded, representing a drop of around 10% to 20% when compared with 2022 and 2018 respectively.

## 5. Robbery

There were a total of 97 cases of robbery, which was the second lowest on record maintained since 1969. While the figure increased by 20 cases (+26%) when compared with the record low in 2022, it registered a drop of 34% when compared with 2018. Besides, the detection rate in 2023 reached 83% (+8.5 percentage points), which was the highest on record.

Over the past year, there were neither bank robbery cases nor robbery cases involving genuine firearms and stun guns. All seven cases of goldsmith/watch and jewelry shop robbery, which were of public concern, were detected, with all stolen property successfully recovered in some of the cases. In January 2024, Police also met with the jewelry and watch industry to provide security advice and thus forestall crimes.

## 6. Burglary

There were 1 354 cases of burglary, which was the second lowest on record, similar to the case of robbery. While the figure was only higher than the record low in 2022 amid the epidemic by 468 cases (+52.8%), it registered a drop of 14% when compared with 2018. The detection rate was 37.4%, which was the second highest on record, with 506 cases detected and 386 persons arrested.

## 7. Theft

There were 23 135 theft cases of various types, an increase of 27% (+4 879 cases) and 8.6% when compared with 2022 and 2018 respectively. The upsurge was mainly attributed to the increase in miscellaneous theft (12 470 cases, +2 742 cases, +28.2%), shop theft (8 221 cases, +1 785 cases, +27.7%) and pickpocketing (673 cases, +488 cases, a 2.6-fold increase). Given that a majority of miscellaneous theft cases involved victims failing to properly look after their belongings in public places and shops, Police urged members of the public to pay due attention.

## 8. Blackmail

A total of 2 659 cases of blackmail were recorded, a rise of 45%. Among the 833 increased cases, "naked chat" alone took 715 cases (to 2 117 cases, +51%). Although the proportion of students falling victim to "naked chat" blackmail dropped from 34.5% in 2021 to 22.8% and 20.9% in 2022 and 2023 respectively, they remained as the largest group of victims. Therefore, Police will continue to conduct targeted publicity and public education alongside enforcement actions, so as to prevent youths, students in particular, from becoming victims.

As for enforcement, Police conducted joint operations with the Public Security Bureau of the Mainland in June. A total of 19 persons were arrested in both the Mainland and Hong Kong. The arrestees were involved in at least 149 deception cases, including "naked chat" blackmail cases. Police also sustained their efforts to step up publicity. In August, an online game named "CyberDefenders' Quest" was launched to raise the awareness of parents and teenagers on sexual grooming.

## 9. Sexual offences

There were 67 cases of rape, with an increase of 14 cases (+26.4%). Only three cases were committed by strangers, all of which were detected. Among the 67 cases, only two cases were yet to be detected. The suspect and the victim of the two cases were co-workers and friends respectively. Police were

actively pursuing for the two suspects.

A total of 1 162 indecent assault cases were recorded, with a rise of 209 cases (+21.9%). The upsurge was attributed to the rise of cases which happened in public places and MTR premises, as well as the post-epidemic resumption of social activities. The detection rate was 77.6%.

#### 10. Serious drug offences

There were 1 153 serious drug cases, with a drop of 283 cases (-19.7%). Seizures of various major drugs recorded increases ranging from 25% to more than two folds. The number of youth students arrested in connection with serious drug cases dropped by nearly half (-47 persons, -49.5%) to 48, while that for non-students arrested only dropped by 36% (-73 persons). It was believed that the difference in the rate of decrease between students and non-students was related to Police's increasing efforts in launching anti-drug publicity and education for students with schools, parents, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders.

Last year, Police continued to promote anti-drug messages among members of the public and stakeholders. For instance, a large-scale anti-drug event was held in November. Besides, a total of 100 mentees of the second cohort of the Leadership Institute on Narcotics (L.I.O.N.) graduated in December, with 10 outstanding mentees going to join an exchange trip to New Zealand in early 2024 to share their experience with local youths and tell the good anti-drug stories of Hong Kong. The third cohort of L.I.O.N has already commenced in January 2024.

#### 11. Triad-related crimes

A total of 2 334 triad-related crimes were recorded, representing a drop of 220 cases (-8.6%). The detection rate was 95.1%, which was a record high over the past 20 years. Police mounted a number of large-scale anti-triad operations over the past year, including the tripartite joint anti-crime operation, codenamed "THUNDERBOLT 2023", mounted by police authorities of Hong Kong, Guangdong and Macao from June to September, with a total of 6 400 persons arrested in Hong Kong.

Police acknowledges that the community's perception of the overall law and order situation is often affected by individual triad-related cases and those of recent concern. It is therefore imperative for Police to detect these cases as soon as possible. As a matter of fact, the number of triad-related wounding and serious assault cases is on a downward trend when compared with both 2022 and 2018, the year before the outbreak of the "black-clad violence" and the epidemic.

#### 12. Youth crime

A total of 3 041 youths were arrested for committing criminal offences, representing a rise of 10% (+267 persons). The upsurge of youth arrested was mainly attributed to the rise in cases of deception (589 persons, +249 persons, +73.2%), shop theft (196 persons, +55 persons, +39%) and

miscellaneous theft (215 persons, +44 persons, +25.7%).

The rise in youth arrests was related to the epidemic, as the figure for 2022 amid the epidemic was the third lowest on record. Nevertheless, last year's figure was 12% below the average of the past decade.

Police are very concerned about the situation of youth crime and have been actively working with school principals' associations, parent-teacher associations and school sponsoring bodies, etc., to step up crime prevention work since 2020, and have collaborated with the Education Bureau since February last year to regularly develop teaching materials and provide training on crime prevention for teachers of primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, including the publishing of the "Youth Crime Prevention Booklet" series for two consecutive years. In January 2024, Police also participated in the Po Leung Kuk Teachers' Development Day to share with 1 000 primary school principals and teachers the strategies to tackle youth crimes and the latest crime prevention information. Furthermore, arrangements have also been made for Police's participation in the teachers' development days of five other secondary schools from March to April.

Besides, Police recently paid a visit to the Education University of Hong Kong on January 25, so as to share with 200 prospective teachers who were pursuing a diploma or a master's degree in education on topics relating to digital literacy, anti-drugs and child protection.

To cultivate the law-abiding awareness among young people and to prevent youths from committing crimes, Police firmly believe that the key is to start educating since young age with ongoing and concerted efforts from various stakeholders. Thus, various stakeholders shall continue to strengthen communication with youngsters so as to reach a synergetic effect. Police will also engage youngsters in Mainland exchange programmes through the Junior Police Call (JPC). In fact, since the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, various police districts have already arranged more than 1 700 JPC members to participate in the programmes.

### 13. Enforcement on National Security Law

As at December 31, 2023, Police arrested a total of 290 persons. Amongst them, around 60% have been charged.

#### Commissioner's Operational Priorities 2024

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There are eight items for the Commissioner's Operational Priorities 2024, which include:

- safeguarding national security
- combating violent crime
- combating triads, syndicated and organised crime
- combating dangerous drugs
- combating deception and quick cash crime
- enhancing cyber security and combating technology crime

- enhancing public safety
- enhancing counter-terrorism

#### Work focuses in 2024

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Firstly, to safeguard national security. Police have to guard against acts of "soft resistance" in the society, and continue to uphold the principle of "laws are observed and strictly enforced, so as to bring offenders to account". Police will keep up effort to strengthen the effectiveness of intelligence gathering, with a view to cracking down on those who endanger national security. Various approaches will also be adopted to proactively raise public awareness about "Spot and Report " awareness.

Secondly, to enhance community engagement and solicit support from members of the public. Police will continue to proactively strengthen communication with various sectors of the community, young people in particular, and make good use of different channels, including traditional and social platforms, so as to extend our reach with members of the public. Police will also sustain our efforts to optimise policing services, boost work efficiency and facilitate members of the public with the aid of technology, and further enhance the transparency of police work, so as to gain public confidence and trust in and support for the Police Force.

Thirdly, to focus on fighting and preventing crimes, with an emphasis on combating deception cases. Police will continue to step up enforcement and enhance prosecution efficiency. In order to rigorously combat the use of stooge accounts by deception syndicates in committing crimes, applications for enhanced sentencing will be made. Approaches such as interception of fraudulent payments and upstream scam intervention will be adopted to minimise victims' losses. Furthermore, Police will continue to raise anti-deception awareness of members of the public through online and offline publicity and actively seek to maintain close cooperation with stakeholders from various sectors, relevant government departments and other law enforcement agencies, including those in the Mainland and overseas, so as to create synergy in combating deception cases.