

# Law and order situation in the first half of 2023

## 1. Overall crime situation

In the first half of 2023, a total of 42 923 crimes were recorded, showing an increase of 11 489 cases (+36.5%) when compared with 31 434 cases in the same period of 2022. Amongst them were 4 759 cases of violent crime, with an increase of 675 cases (+16.5%). Analysis showed that there were dual factors causing such a surge, namely the increase in deception cases and the society's resumption of normalcy. The detection rate of overall crimes in the first half of 2023 was 27.2%. The increase in overall crime and violent crime moderated in the second quarter of 2023 when compared with the same period of last year. For overall crime, the rise of 48% in the first quarter of this year narrowed down to 27% in the second quarter when compared to the same quarters last year, while for violent crime, the rise of 22% in the first quarter narrowed down to 12% in the second quarter when compared to the same quarters last year.

Although the increase of deception cases led to the rise of the overall crime, over the past six months, the increase in deception cases had indeed already moderated. While the number in the first quarter of 2023 represented an increase of 65% over the same period last year, a narrower increase of 42% was observed in the second quarter when compared to the same quarter of 2022. Such trend suggested that Police's collaboration with other stakeholders is starting to bear fruit and the massive publicity and education efforts had raised public awareness. In fact, technology crimes and deception cases recorded a rapid surge around the globe in recent years, which resembled the situation of Hong Kong.

Besides, looking back on the first half of last year amid the epidemic outbreak, the number of traditional crimes was at a very low level, with figures of wounding and serious assault, burglary, rape, theft and robbery hitting a record low. As the society started to resume normalcy this year, it was noted that records of most traditional crimes had returned to pre-epidemic normal levels.

Leaving deception cases aside, a total of 24 180 crimes were recorded in the first half of 2023, representing a mild increase of around 13% when compared to the same period in 2019 (21 440 cases) before the epidemic outbreak. Various traditional crimes trended downwards, including burglary, wounding and serious assault, arson, rape and indecent assault, except for theft and blackmail which posted a significant increase in the number of cases recorded. "Naked chat" blackmail, which was classified as technology crime by its nature, accounted for 76% of the blackmail cases reported. This further indicated that the situation of traditional crimes remained stable.

## 2. Deception

The number of deception cases rose from 12 326 cases to 18 743 cases, registering an increase of 52.1% (+ 6 417 cases). Over 75% of the reports were online deception. Majority of the cases were e-shopping fraud (4 872 cases), phishing scams (2 741 cases), employment fraud (2 287 cases), investment fraud (2 163 cases) and telephone deception (1 579 cases), noting a soar ranging from 23% to one-fold. The total pecuniary loss amounted to \$2.69 billion, representing an increase of 28%.

With a view to tackling various types of deception, Police have been mounting intelligence-led operations, neutralising multiple deception syndicates in the past six months with the arrest of over 1 790 persons.

The Anti-Deception Coordination Centre (ADCC) continued to contribute by preventing victims of 192 cases from wiring money to fraudsters and intercepting over \$600 million.

It takes more than the efforts of Police to combat deception. Therefore, Police have all along been proactively working in collaboration with relevant departments, regulatory authorities and industries. Since September last year, Police proposed setting up a working group with the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) and mobile network operators to take forward a series of measures, including the blockage of hyperlinks and telephone numbers relating to deception cases.

To combat fraudulent calls originating from outside Hong Kong, telecommunications service providers have started to block all spoofed calls from outside Hong Kong with the prefix "+852", and to send voice and text alerts to service users when they receive incoming calls originating from outside Hong Kong with caller number prefixed with "+852". Besides, since the implementation of the OFCA's Code of Practice on Management of Scam Calls on June 30, the mobile network operators had been taking the initiative to identify and intercept scam calls on the technical front, and target particularly syndicates which made a large number of scam calls with the use of technical devices. These measures will better keep members of the public safe from scams.

Since the above measures came into effect, the number of deception cases in June fell from the peak as recorded for the period from March to May. The number of telephone deception cases in June also dropped by more than 10% when compared with May, and even by 23% when comparing the first half of 2023 with the second half of 2022, showcasing the importance of collaboration between Police and stakeholders.

Furthermore, in response to the upsurge in phishing scams, the OFCA, subject to the examination conducted by the working group, will also introduce an SMS sender registration system for companies. It is the target of the working group to commence a pilot run of the scheme for the banking industry by the end of this year, with a view to assisting members of the public to ascertain the authenticity of SMS messages.

Apart from the OFCA and mobile network operators, the banking industry is another key stakeholder in combating deception cases. Therefore, Police

joined hands with the Hong Kong Monetary Authority and the banking industry in April to actively explore all possibilities. One of the initiatives is the launch of the Financial Intelligence Evaluation Sharing Tool (FINEST) which facilitates the exchange of suspicious transaction data of corporate clients for more effective combat against criminal activities.

Police will also strengthen efforts in conducting anti-deception publicity and education work, and actively promote the use of "Scameter" and its mobile application "Scameter+". The search engines have been widely used by the public. To date, they have logged around 1.07 million enquiries, of which 16% involved risks and around 60% of those involved risks related to confirmed deception cases. In June, Police rolled out Project SILVERSHIELD, in which various government departments and public and private organisations were invited for collaboration on the recruitment of volunteers to promote anti-scam knowledge through communal efforts. Police also collaborated with the OFCA and mobile network operators in August to send anti-deception SMS to mobile phone users in Hong Kong, in a bid to further heighten public awareness on phishing scams.

Over the past year, Police and stakeholders have taken forward various innovative initiatives to combat deception. Apart from Police's deception figures which showed a moderated increase lately, with reference to the figures recently released by the Hong Kong Computer Emergency Response Team Co-ordination Centre, the number of phishing-related cybersecurity events drastically dropped by nearly 80% in the first quarter of 2023 when compared to the fourth quarter last year. This indicates that the collaboration and complementation between Police and stakeholders can yield remarkable results.

Police will continue to focus on quelling and preventing deception and provide a large amount of manpower and resources for crime prevention, hoping that members of the public pay more attention to the anti-deception messages, remain vigilant and remind others of the modus operandi of scammers. The public are also urged to make good use of the tools provided by Police including "Anti-scam Helpline 18222", "Scameter" or "Scameter +", so as to avoid being victimised.

### 3. Homicide

In the first half of 2023, 16 cases of homicide were recorded, which was the same as the number recorded in the corresponding period last year. Among them, seven cases involved domestic or family violence. 15 cases had already been detected. For the remaining case, the suspect has absconded overseas but his identity has been ascertained and Police are making every effort to bring him to justice.

### 4. Wounding and serious assault

There were 1 796 cases of wounding and serious assault, dropping by nearly 13% when compared to that of the same period in 2019 as prior to the epidemic outbreak. Comparing to the same period last year, there was an increase of 10% (+163 cases). The rise was attributed to the upsurge in cases involving domestic violence and various conflicts. The detection rate was

69.7%. Besides, triad-related wounding and serious assault took 130 cases which saw a drop when compared to the same period last year and in 2019 (dropped by 17.2% and 3.7% respectively), thus indicating that the situation had not deteriorated.

Over the past few months, a number of cases of street violence occurred in Hong Kong and attracted serious public concerns. With reference to the risk assessment and peak hours of crowd gathering, Police have immediately mobilised officers from the back office, plainclothes duties, marine region, etc. to carry out high-profile patrols, stops and searches, and anti-crime operations in crime black spots and other hotspots with crowds throughout all districts in Hong Kong, with a view to posing deterrent effect against violent acts and strengthening the sense of security among members of the public.

## 5. Theft

There were 11 092 theft cases, showing an increase of around 12% when compared to that of the same period in 2019 as prior to the epidemic outbreak. When compared to the same period last year, it represented an increase of 2 857 cases (+34.7%). The upsurge was attributed to the rise of miscellaneous theft, most of which involved victims failing to properly look after their belongings in public places and shops (5 987 cases, +1 713 cases), and shop theft (3 939 cases, +949 cases).

Police had already stepped up efforts to conduct patrols, and stop and search suspicious persons at crime black spots, and had enhanced crime prevention publicity and held press conferences to remind the public of taking care of their belongings. In addition, Police held an engagement session with over 50 representatives of the retail industry in June to discuss strategies for combating shop theft. Police also took the opportunity to provide suggestions on enhancing security measures for the participants.

## 6. Robbery and burglary

There were 59 cases of robbery, representing a rise of 18 cases (+43.9%). The detection rate rose 5.3 percentage points to 71%. The number of robbery cases was half the average number of cases over the past decade (119.9 cases).

There were 572 burglary cases. Amongst them, Police detected a total of 165 cases and arrested 147 persons. Although it was a rise of 191 cases (+50.1%) when compared to the same period last year, it was a drop by 27% when compared to the first half of 2019 as prior to the epidemic outbreak, showing an improving trend. The rise in burglary cases was mostly attributed to cases involving residential premises (+181 cases, +87%). It was believed that burglars preyed on homes which were left unattended when people had resumed work, schooling and trips. Police advise the public to properly lock windows and doors and take anti-theft measures, as well as not to keep valuables at home to prevent loss. In July, Police met the Hong Kong Association of Property Management Companies Limited and introduced various reporting channels in different situations.

## 7. Sexual offences

There were 21 rape cases, representing an increase of one case. All the cases were detected, and none involved strangers. A total of 565 cases of indecent assault were recorded, representing an increase of 163 cases (+40.5%). 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. Detection rate of indecent assault cases was 78%.

When compared to that of the same period in 2019 as prior to the epidemic outbreak, the number of rape and indecent assault cases dropped by around 28% and 1.4% respectively, which showed no signs of deterioration. Police will continue to monitor the trend of sexual offences and collaborate with relevant stakeholders for targeted publicity and public education.

## 8. Serious drug offence

There were 592 cases of serious drug offence, registering a drop of 91 cases. In the first half of 2023, Police continued to mount operations to combat drug offences, thereby resulting in an increase in the amount of cocaine, cannabis and heroin seized, with a soar ranging from 70% to 2.7-fold. 99 youths were arrested, representing a drop of over 30% for two consecutive years since the first half of 2021 with 224 youths arrested, as well as the lowest in the past 10 years. The significant drop was believed to be the result of enhanced anti-drugs publicity and education work jointly done by Police, schools, parents and non-governmental organisations since 2021, including the establishment of "Leadership Institute on Narcotics", and the publication of the booklet "A Chronicle of Juvenile Crimes – Strategies for Teachers and Parents" which facilitates teachers' introduction of drug harms to students.

## 9. Youth crime

In the first half of 2023, arrested youths aged 10 to 20 registered an increase of 284 persons (+22.8%) to 1 529 persons. Involved crimes mainly included wounding and serious assault (232 persons), deception (217 persons), miscellaneous theft (102 persons), shop theft (97 persons) and indecent assault (84 persons). The number of youth arrestees saw an increase when compared with the same period last year, during which the figures hit the third-lowest in record amid the epidemic outbreak.

Youth crime is a complex social issue, which requires different sectors of the community to strengthen collaboration on publicity and education with a view to cultivating youths' law-abiding awareness. Over the past year, Police stepped up efforts to conduct crime prevention work with school heads associations, parent-teacher associations and school sponsoring bodies. The Junior Police Call also organised a number of Mainland exchange programmes for youngsters to learn more about national development. To further raise students' crime prevention awareness, Police continued to arrange school visits by the anti-scam mascot "Little Grape", and stage a roving "Interactive Anti-drugs Drama" for schools. Before the commencement of the new school year, Police will publish a booklet titled "A Chronicle of

Juvenile Crimes – Strategies for Teachers and Parents II”, which will provide anti-crime strategies and messages for teachers, parents and youngsters.

#### 10. Enforcement on National Security Law

As at June 30 this year, Police arrested a total of 260 persons. Amongst them, around 60% have been charged.

#### 11. Conclusion

While the first half of 2023 saw an increase in the crime statistics due to an upsurge in deception cases and the resumption of social activities after the epidemic, the overall law and order situation remained stable. Compared with other international cities, Hong Kong has all along been maintaining a low crime rate.

Hong Kong is our home. We must all play our part in preventing and combating crimes. Apart from the all-out efforts made by Police in upholding law and order, the support of the community and members of the public is vital for crime prevention and detection work. With the co-operation of all relevant stakeholders and members of the public, the efforts of Police will certainly yield more effective results. To this end, Police have rolled out various campaigns in phases to call on members of the public to assist in crime investigation by reporting suspicious activities. Members of the public are encouraged to spot and report suspicious incidents through the WeChat “Spot and Report” mini programme as introduced in June. Police have also recently launched the Hong Kong Taxi Drivers “Spot and Report” Campaign and will soon seek to extend the scope of the programme to cover the bus and trucking industries. Besides, since the introduction of “Counter-terrorism (CT) Reporting Hotline” and “CT Reward” Scheme in June last year, Police received a total of over 20 000 messages, a considerable number of which contained useful information for Police to conduct follow-up actions. During the period from June to July this year, Police received three cases reported by taxi drivers, enabling the successful interception of two cases of gang fight and the arrest of a drug criminal. Furthermore, Police have launched Project CARCAMS to encourage vehicle owners to join to assist in crime investigation by providing Police with footage of their dashboard cameras where necessary.

Following a major transition from chaos to order, Hong Kong is at the crucial stage of advancing to prosperity. Police will remain steadfast in performing our duties and maintaining law and order to make Hong Kong a better place to live and work.