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CRIME TRENDS IN FINLAND

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Summary

- In Finland, homicide decreased from the early 1990s until recently; the drop levelled out in 2020–22, with 2023 showing a low rate.
- While the role of alcohol has decreased, homicide remains dominated by marginalised male alcoholics and drinking group conflicts. Among young victims (15- to 29-year-olds), homicide is linked to drugs and contacts to criminal activity.
- Assault offences remained stable in 2014–2023, a trend corroborated by victim surveys.
- Recorded rape offences and sexual offences against children have increased during the decade. It should be noted that the legislation has been reformed several times, most recently in the beginning of 2023, and this has broadened the definitions of these crimes. However, recent surveys have also observed rising numbers of victim experiences.
- Personal and household theft victimisation decreased, while theft offences reported to the police remained stable. The divergence can reflect theft against businesses being more stable than personal victimisation.
- Fraud and identity theft have increased; this trend is corroborated by both administrative statistics and the national crime victim survey.
- The role of alcohol in violent offending has decreased. This has been observed in administrative statistics and in youth surveys.
- In the age groups 15–17 and 18–20, violence, theft and property destruction decreased in the early part of the decade, levelling out after that.
- In Finland, youths under 15 years of age are not criminally culpable. However, their offences are recorded in administrative crime statistics. In this age category, the recorded assault offence rate doubled from 2014 to 2023. Patterns such as use of sharp instruments and offenders taking videos of the crime have increased.
- International comparisons of violence in European and Nordic adult populations suggest that Finland has above-average problems related to lethal and other violence, against both men and women.
- This report concludes by summarizing recent findings on the efficacy of crime prevention methods as applied in Finland.

1. Introduction

Since 1975, the Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy, University of Helsinki (KRIMO) has published an annual overview of crime trends in Finland. The report is published in Finnish (Kolttola 2024). To make the basic findings available for wider audiences, this short report summarizes key findings in English.

A characteristic feature of KRIMO's crime monitoring activities has been the parallel use of (a) administrative statistics of recorded crimes and (b) survey-based indicators of crime. Survey-based crime measurement was started in the early 1960s and has continued, often in international survey contexts (Kivivuori 2011). The purpose of the surveys was originally to "correct" presumed biases in official crime statistics. However, it is increasingly recognised that administrative statistics and surveys are mutually supplementary measures that capture different ends of the crime continuum. As is reported in this summary, there are also indications that after a major period of rise during the late 20th century, the propensity of people to report offences to the police has stabilised. This would increase the trend validity of official crime statistics.

Following the longstanding principle of combined use of official records and population surveys, this report focuses on homicide and on crime types whose trends can be cross-validated by both data sources. The final part (section 7) of the report provides an overview of crime prevention methods applied in Finland. This part of the report draws on the crime prevention research database FINPREV and on a recent systematic review of Nordic studies relevant for social policy-based prevention (Beuker, Kivivuori, and Raeste 2024a, 2024b; Suonpää et al. 2023). The focus is on methods whose preventive effect has research-based support¹.

¹Research summarised in this report has received funding from the Strategic Research Council established within the Research Council of Finland, grant numbers 352600 and 352601.

Finland

Situated in northern Europe, Finland has a population of 5.6 million (2024). In terms of socio-political institutions, Finland belongs to a group of Nordic welfare states with Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. It has a compulsory and free-of-charge school system, connecting all youths to educational institutions up to the age of 18. In the UN Human Development Index, Finland ranks 11th among 193 ranked nations, belonging to the category of “very high human development” (UNDP 2024).

With regard to its criminal justice system, Finland represents a culture of penal moderation, with policy emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation. The Finnish prisoner rate of 52 per 100 000 population rate is one of the lowest in Europe and the world. Over the last decade, the Finnish prisoner rate has decreased. In the European comparison, Finland belongs to the cluster of countries with a “very low” prisoner rate, defined by having a 25 % lower rate than the European median value (Aebi and Cocco 2024).

Crime indicators

In this report, we have drawn on administrative crime statistics and KRIMO crime surveys to describe trends in selected crimes in Finland. The use of administrative statistics and survey data in tandem is mutually complementary. Administrative statistics do not include crimes that have not been reported to the authorities. The propensity of people to report offences to the police is a temporal and spatial variable. To tackle this challenge, criminology has developed the hidden crime survey (Kivivuori 2011). Unfortunately, such crime surveys typically fail to capture the most serious crimes and the most marginalised offender and victim groups. Furthermore, crime surveys typically produce national estimates, thus overlooking the geographical concentration of crime within local areas. Therefore, this summary report has focused primarily (but not exclusively) on homicide and on crime types for which survey information is available, in order to present a cross-validated overview of recent crime trends. Since the survey indicators do not allow for local trends, we consider Finland as a single

observation area in this summary report.

Administrative statistics of recorded crimes. The primary source is the Statistics on Offences and Coercive Measures (SOCM), compiled and published by Statistics Finland. In this report, we primarily used figures on offences reported to the police. Figures based on suspects in cleared offences are also needed whenever socio-demographic breakdown is used. In both cases, counts are based on offences as observation units, meaning that a single person may have committed more than one offence per annum. The gross number of offences reported to the police may reflect crime incidence and/or reporting propensity. Except for homicide, attempts are included in the figures. Homicides are additionally examined by cause of death statistics, counting victims of lethal violence.

Crime surveys. Regarding crime surveys, we drew on KRIMO key monitoring systems, such as the Finnish Crime Victim Survey (FCVS, 1980/2012-) and the Finnish Self-Report Delinquency Study (FSRD, 1995-). The Finnish Crimes against Businesses Survey (FCBS), conducted in 2010 and 2018, has also been referenced. KRIMO has developed these survey systems by combining international models with methodological research under local conditions (Aaltonen et al. 2012; Kivivuori, Sirén, and Danielsson 2012; Kivivuori, Salmi, and Walser 2013; Kivivuori et al. 2014; Kaakinen et al. 2022).

We have cited selected further research if it provides clarification of observed trends and pattern changes, to allow the interested reader to find more in-depth analyses of the descriptive trends.

2. Crime trends

Homicide

Homicide includes five legal crime labels: murder, manslaughter, manslaughter under mitigating circumstances, infanticide, and assault leading to death. Under Finnish penal law, the last-mentioned category refers to incidents in which the violence was intentional, while the result of death was not. Together, these crime rubrics correspond to the definition of homicide used in the European Homicide Monitor standard (Granath 2012), capturing lethal and intentional interpersonal violence.

Over the last ten years, the number of these offences has varied between 116 and 64. In 2023, the homicide rate in Finland was 1.14 per 100 000 population.

Table 1 Homicide offences reported to the police, Finland 2014-2023 (SOCM.)

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Homicides | 112 | 116 | 96 | 74 | 95 | 83 | 95 | 94 | 83 | 64 |
| Homicide per 100 000 pop | 2.05 | 2.11 | 1.74 | 1.34 | 1.72 | 1.50 | 1.72 | 1.69 | 1.49 | 1.14 |

Figure 1 shows the homicide trend based on cause-of-death statistics from 1955, using 5-year periods, with the years 2020-2023 also given. The trend shows a high homicide rate period from 1970 to the beginning of the 1990s, after which a consistent homicide drop took place. The most recent observation years suggests an end to the drop. Note that infanticides, defined as including victims less than one year old, have not been included in Figure 1.

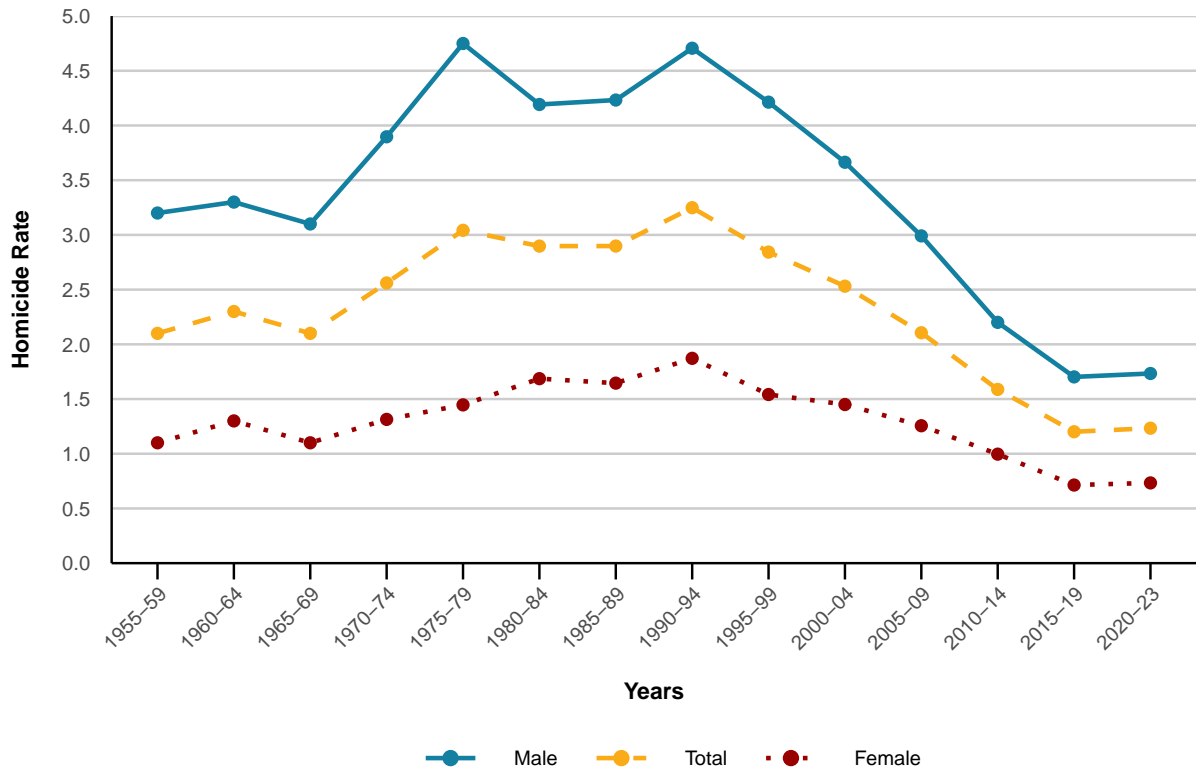


Figure 1 Homicide fatality rate per 100 000 population, Finland 1955-2023. Victims younger than 1 year old have not been included.

Finnish homicide is still characterised by a high proportion of incidents involving drunken marginalised males. However, the presence of alcohol drunkenness in homicide has decreased since the 1990s (Lehti 2014). Over the last 10 years, the proportion of offenders under the influence of alcohol has remained rather stable whereas the role of drug use has increased.

Finnish homicide trends have been extensively analysed, with studies ranging from long duration change (Lehti and Sirén 2020; Kivivuori et al. 2022) to analyses of the 1970s homicide boom (Kivivuori 2003) and the post-1990s homicide drop in Finland (Lehti 2014) and in the European context (Suonpää et al. 2022).

Assault

Assaults include three crime rubrics: assault, aggravated assault, and petty assault. The recorded number of these offences was 32,928 in 2014, and 41,271 in 2023. The number of reported offences was relatively stable from 2014 to 2021, with approximately 6 offences per 1000 population. Since 2022 there has been a slight increase and in 2023 assault offences rose to more than 7 offences per 1000 population (Table 2). There were 25 % more recorded assaults in 2023 than 10 years before.

Table 2 Assault offences reported to the police, Finland 2014-2023 (SOCM.)

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Assault offences | 32 928 | 33 661 | 33 769 | 33 535 | 33 639 | 33 849 | 33 285 | 34 123 | 38 160 | 41 271 |
| Assaults per 1000 p | 6.02 | 6.13 | 6.14 | 6.08 | 6.10 | 6.13 | 6.01 | 6.15 | 6.86 | 7.36 |

National victim surveys largely corroborate the stable recorded offences trend from 2012 to 2023 (Figure 2). However, we cannot observe victimisation rising after 2021 above the levels observed ten years earlier. Note that the FCVS system moved to 2-year intervals after 2021.

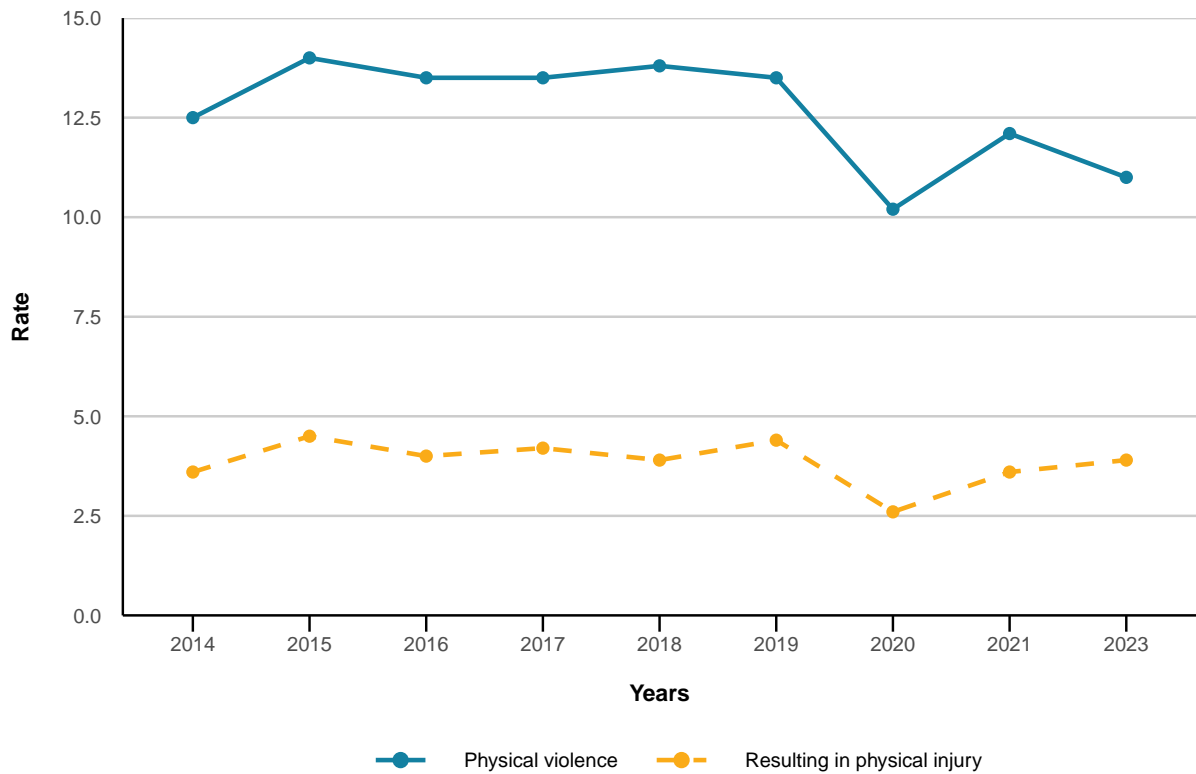


Figure 2 Violence victims, % of 15–74-year-olds, 2014–2023, Finland. (FCVS).

The year 2020 shows a violence dip (Figure 2). The temporary decrease could probably be explained by COVID-19 related lockdowns and closures, as bars and restaurants were closed for a period in the spring of 2020. The most recent reading (2021) saw restoration of the standard level of risk. This temporary drop is not seen in police statistics.

During the period 1980–2009, when intermittent victim surveys were conducted, Finnish victimisation trends and trends of recorded offences were often divergent, a discrepancy explained by an increasing propensity of victims to report crimes to the police. During the last decade, reporting propensity has saturated to a stable level, a partial explanation why survey and register sources yielded similar trends in assault offences.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence here comprises rape offences (rape and aggravated rape, including attempts; Criminal Code 20:1-2) and sexual offences against children (rape of a child, aggravated rape of a child, sexual abuse of a child, aggravated sexual abuse of a child, child sexual abuse, including attempts; Criminal Code 20:12-16).

The law on sexual offences was reformed and the new legislation entered into force in the beginning of 2023, expanding the definitions of crimes and increasing penalties. The most significant changes were the consent-based definition of rape and the separation of sexual offenses against children from those against adults. In addition to rape, the lack of voluntariness was also emphasized in other sexual offenses. For instance, sexual harassment can be committed through other acts besides touching when the act is severe enough.

The number of rape offences reported to the police has increased in the past 10 years (Table 3). In 2023 the number of reported offences was 1,919, which is the highest number in a ten-year period. This can partly be explained by legislative changes and victim awareness.

Table 3 Rape offences reported to the police, Finland 2014-2023 (SOCM)

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Rape offences | 1 009 | 1 043 | 1 160 | 1 245 | 1 393 | 1 477 | 1 450 | 1 851 | 1 669 | 1 919 |
| Rape offences per 10000 p | 1.84 | 1.90 | 2.11 | 2.26 | 2.52 | 2.67 | 2.62 | 3.34 | 3.00 | 3.42 |

Figure 3 compares recorded rapes with victim self-reports on sexual violence. Note that the measurement units are different: recorded offences are measured as offences per 10,000 persons, while the sexual victimisation scale is measured as percentages (much more prevalent). There is some consistency in the trends, even though the rise in the results of FCVS is not statistically significant on an annual level.

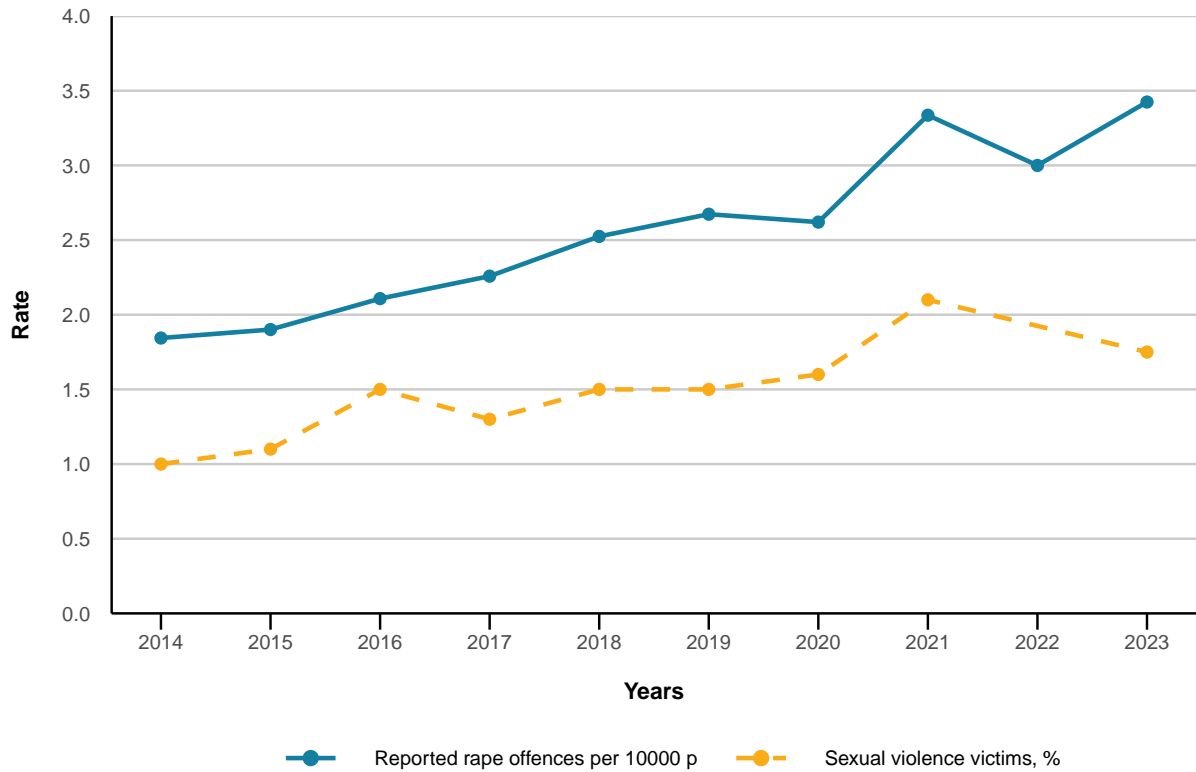


Figure 3 Reported rape offences per 10 000 persons (SOCM) and percentage of sexual violence victims among 15–74-year-olds (FCVS), Finland 2014-2023.

Over the past ten years, the number of sexual offences against children reported to the police has varied annually as the number is dependent on crime series and the way they have been recorded (Table 4). Since 2018, the number has been growing annually, but levelled off in 2023. In that year, 2,319 cases of sexual offences against children were reported to the police, which is a 2.5 percent decrease from the previous year. Some of the increase can be explained by changes in law and reporting propensities but the increase in recent years cannot be fully explained by these changes.

Table 4 Sexual offences against children reported to the police, Finland 2014–2023 (SOCM)

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Sexual offences against children | 1 415 | 1 225 | 1 242 | 1 168 | 1 373 | 1 709 | 1 770 | 2 089 | 2 379 | 2 319 |
| Sexual offences against children per 10,000 p | 2.59 | 2.23 | 2.26 | 2.12 | 2.49 | 3.09 | 3.20 | 3.77 | 4.28 | 4.14 |

The Finnish child victim survey (CVS, conducted in the years 1988, 2008, 2013 and 2022) and School Health Promotion Study (SHPS, comparable question in 2019) asked ninth graders (age approx. 15) about their sexual experiences with persons at least 5 years older than them. Figure 4 examines trends in self-reported crime in relation to the crimes reported to the police. Note the different measurement units. The increase in the results of the child victim survey between the years 2013 and 2022 is not statistically significant (Mielityinen et al. 2023).

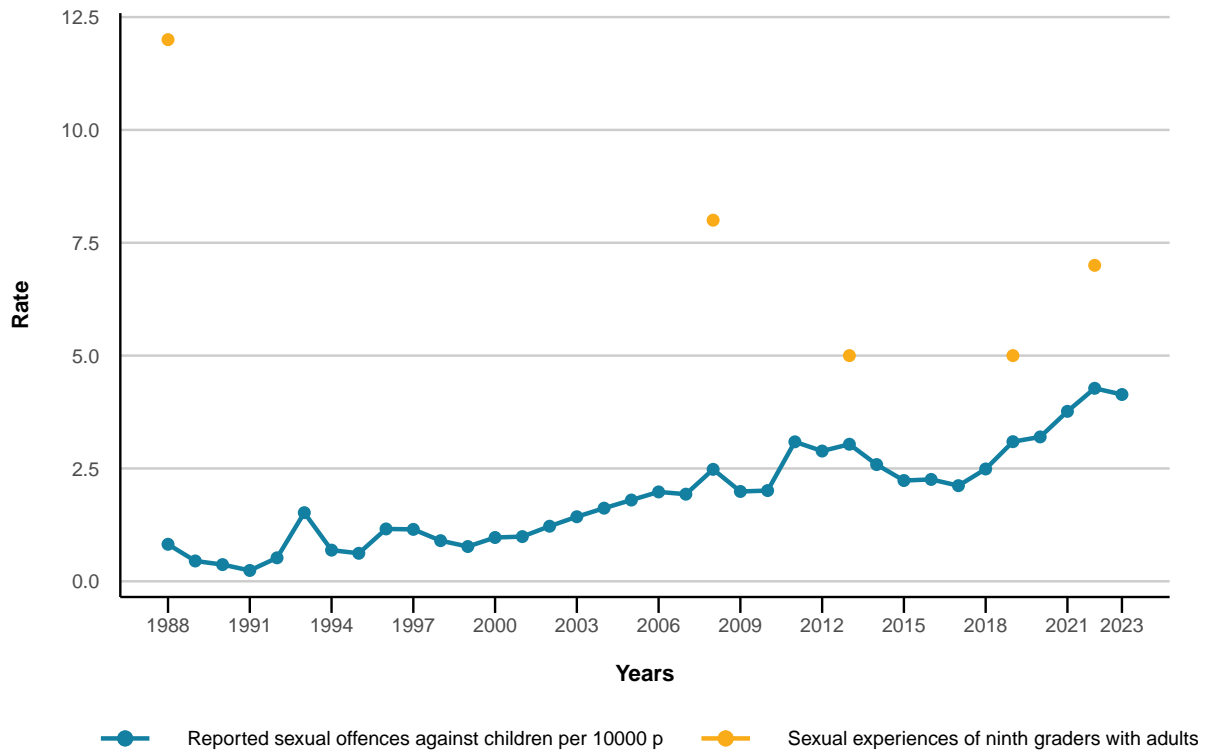


Figure 4 Reported sexual offences against children per 10000 persons (SOCM) and percentage of ninth graders with sexual experiences with adults (CVS) (Mielityinen et al. 2023; Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare 2019).

Theft

Theft offences include petty theft, theft, and aggravated theft. The number of thefts reported to the police has remained relatively stable in absolute terms and per population. In 2020, the year of COVID-19 lockdowns, the number of reported theft offences was above average. Within the general theft category, aggravated theft decreased from 3682 in 2013 to 2031 in 2023.

Table 5 Theft offences reported to the police, Finland 2014-2023 (SOCM)

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Reported theft offences | 143 141 | 138 571 | 131 432 | 125 431 | 122 741 | 126 906 | 139 121 | 127 791 | 128 250 | 130 018 |
| Reported theft offences per 1000 pop | 26.16 | 25.25 | 23.88 | 22.75 | 22.24 | 22.97 | 25.14 | 23.03 | 23.05 | 23.20 |

The *Finnish Crime Victim Survey* captures the percentage of persons whose personal property was stolen outside the home (Figure 5). This type of victimisation decreased over the last decade, with the most recent measurement years showing a divergence from the trend. The decreasing trend can also be seen in vehicle theft, as captured by the FCVS (not shown).

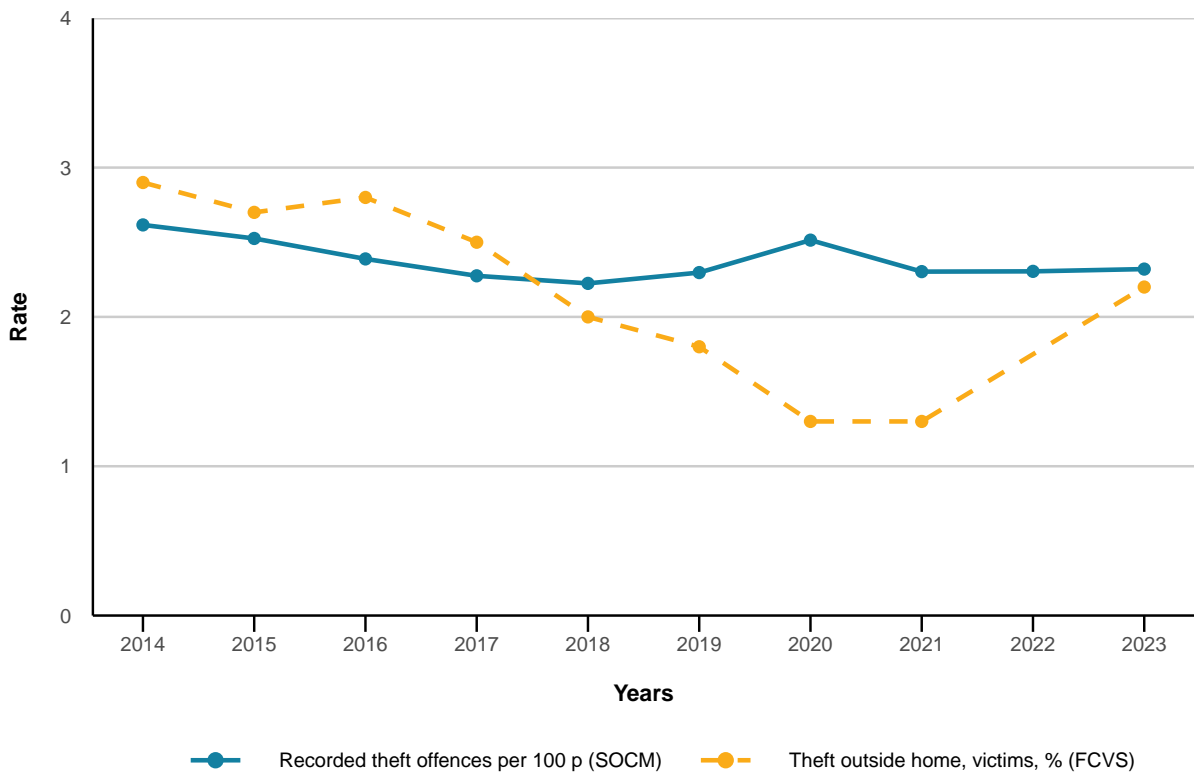


Figure 5 Theft of personal property outside home, per cent of the 15–74-year-old population (FCVS), contrasted with reported theft offences per 100 persons (SOCM).

The declining trend of theft against persons and households reflects a drop in the theft of vehicles and other physical property. In contrast, identity theft and consumer fraud have increased over the last decade, as observed in both administrative statistics and the FCVS survey system (Figure 6).

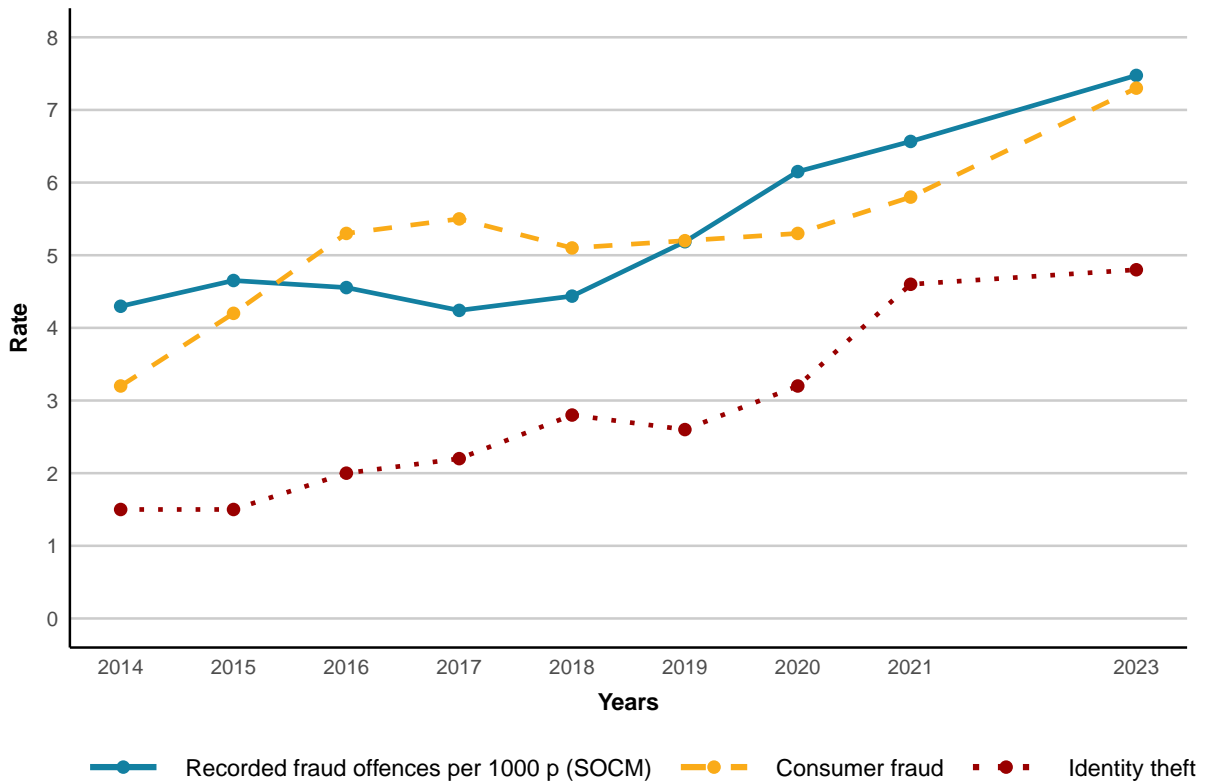


Figure 6 Consumer fraud (FCVS) and identity theft (FCVS), % of the 15–74-year-old population, contrasted with reported fraud offences per 1000 persons (SOCM).

It should be noted that theft offences reported to the police include crimes against businesses and institutions, a quantitatively major crime target. According to the Finnish Crimes against Businesses Survey (FCBS), theft against the retail sector remained stable between 2010 and 2018, with some increase in offences committed by unknown persons (Saarikkomäki, Lehti, and Kivivuori 2019). Based on this information, it seems that the decreasing trend in theft has benefitted private persons and households more than businesses in the retail sector.

Economic crime

Economic crime covers in this instance tax offences, accounting offences, and bankruptcy offences. The number of police-recorded economic crimes has decreased since 2019, which marked the highest total numbers of economic crimes in ten years. In 2023, police registered 3,206 tax offences, accounting offences, and bankruptcy offences. This means that the number of economic offences increased by 14 per cent from the previous year.

Table 6 Economic offences reported to the police, Finland 2014-2023 (SOCM)

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Economic offences | 2 666 | 2 685 | 2 954 | 3 129 | 3 159 | 3 383 | 2 983 | 2 440 | 2 822 | 3 206 |
| Economic offences per 10 000 persons | 4.87 | 4.89 | 5.37 | 5.68 | 5.72 | 6.12 | 5.39 | 4.40 | 5.07 | 5.72 |

Before the recent decrease in reported economic offences, the number of offences had risen continuously since 2010. The decrease from the peak of 2019 has mostly been due to a decrease in tax offences, just as the increase in 2010-2019 was due to rising numbers of tax offences. Accounting offences and bankruptcy offences have remained fairly stable. The observed decrease in tax offences has likely been caused by the changing emphasis in resource allocation within the field of investigation of economic offences and risk-based tax audits.

With regard to economic crime, no survey-based data are available to complement the above trend descriptions based on police statistics. In the 2018 Crimes against Businesses Survey (FCBS), firms were asked to report if their competitors had used illegal means in business activities in relation to employees, such as illegal working conditions and terms. In the hotel and restaurant sector, eight per cent of the firms had perceived such illegal competition, whereas the same percentage in the retail sector was 2 per cent (Saarikkomäki, Lehti, and Kivivuori 2019). However, the trend remains unspecified as there has not been a repeated survey after 2018.

3. Youth crime

Crime trends among young people are monitored in Finland by means of both criminal justice statistics and surveys. In what follows, we use both. As noted above, these basic sources capture different parts of the seriousness continuum. For serious crime *incidents* such as homicide, serious violence, and robbery, administrative statistics are more reliable than surveys. In contrast, surveys are indispensable sources for the prevalence of young *persons* participation in less serious mass crime.

The Finnish criminal justice system uses three age categories of youth, with repercussions on how offenders are punished or treated. Persons under 15 years of age are not criminally culpable. In such cases, the social services deal with the matter. However, the crime is entered into the police information system (and therefore into the SOCM). Age categories 15 to 17 and 18 to 20 have special stipulations that reduce penal severity. To match this logic, we have used the same age categories in our descriptions of crime trends.

Over the last 10 years, theft offences by young people have first decreased substantially, and then increased since the year 2022. Property destruction decreased in the first half of the decade among 15- to 20-year-olds, remaining stable after that. This crime type was stable in the youngest age group. Violence (assault offences) increased in the youngest group and decreased in the 18 to 20 category. The middle category of 15 to 17 showed a nonlinear trend: first a decrease and, after 2018, a moderate increase in police-recorded assaults. The increase in the group of less than 15-year-olds was drastic: the number of offences per 10 000 population increased from 11 in 2012 to 25 in 2021.

The Finnish Self-Report Delinquency Study (FSRD) is a nationally representative crime survey among 15–16-year-olds (Suonpää, Raeste, and Saarteenoja 2024);Kaakinen et al.(2022)

Following the logic of this report, it is of some interest to compare the FSRD survey-based findings with the police-recorded crime trends in the age category 15 to 17. These comparisons are shown in Figures 7a, 7b, and 7c below. Note that the police-recorded offending figure is offence-based – meaning that the same individual can appear multiple times in the same dataset – while the survey observations are person-based. Also, the vertical scales differ: the scale is percentages for the survey and rates per 1000 persons for the administrative statistic. Overall, the two sources largely agree on the decrease in offending in the early 2010s. However, the trends in recent years seem to diverge. The increase in theft offences is observed in both datasets whereas assault offenses increased only in the administrative data.

Based on police-recorded offences, the crime trends have been quite similar in the 18 to 20 and 15 to 17 age groups (decrease and levelling out). In the youngest group, the trends are different and show an increase in recorded violence.

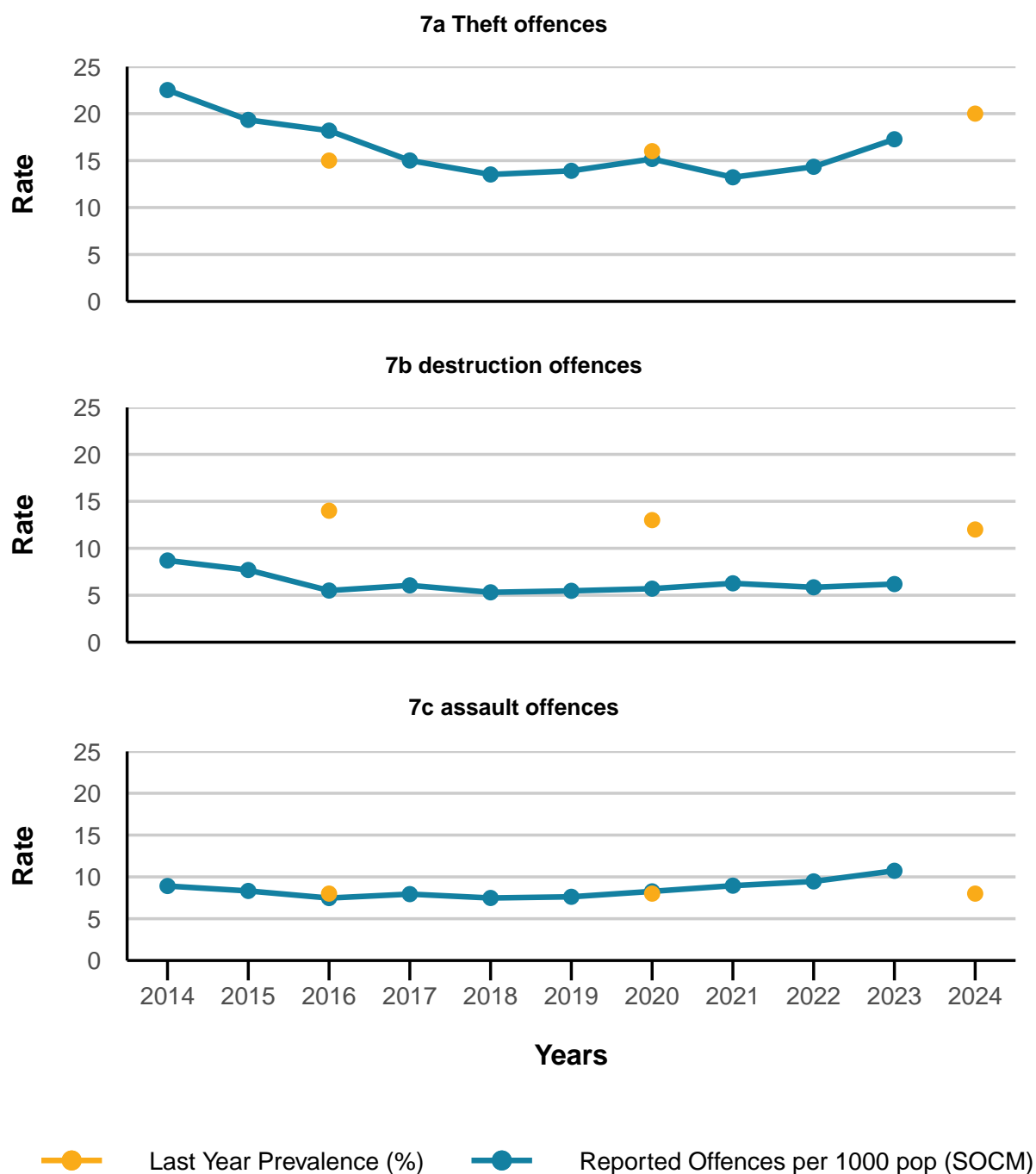


Figure 7a, 7b and 7c Theft, property destruction and assault offences by young persons: comparison of police recorded offences (15–17-year-olds) (SOCM) and self-reported prevalence rates (15–16-year-olds). Finland 2012–2024 (FSRD).

Based on police-recorded offences, the crime trends have been quite similar in the 18 to 20 and 15 to 17 age groups (decrease and levelling out). In the youngest group, the trends are different and show an increase in recorded violence.

In the category of youths under 15 years of age, police-recorded assaults and robberies have increased over the last seven to eight years (Danielsson 2022). Even though there have been changes in the compulsory reporting of incidents by child protection agencies, the best currently available analyses indicate that the rise of violence in this group cannot be completely explained by increased reporting propensity (Danielsson 2022). The increase is general in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Sharp instruments and taking videos during the incident are increasingly often seen in incidents involving minors (Danielsson 2022).

4. Alcohol and drugs

Traditionally, the Finnish homicide scene has been heavily connected to drinking group violence among marginalised and unemployed males. The dynamics of homicide has been connected to total alcohol consumption in the long historical perspective (Lehti and Sirén 2020). However, over the last 20-30 years, the presence of alcohol in homicide has decreased (Lehti 2014). A recent analysis of homicide comparing young and adult victims indicated that the young victims (15–29-year-olds) were often under the influence of drugs at the time of the offence, whereas adult victimisation still retained strong links to alcohol use. The same analysis indicated that youth homicide victimisation was more often linked to firearm violence in public places, premeditation, and links to criminal activities (Kivivuori et al. 2024).

Thus, while alcohol retains its high presence in crimes of violence, its role appears to be decreasing. The intoxication status figures of assault and robbery suspects based on official statistics are challenging to interpret, because the category of crimes where the intoxication status is “not known” is large and increasing. However, homicide analyses suggest that the decreasing trend of alcohol is real rather than a statistical artefact. Additional support for this is seen in the FSRD youth crime surveys. They indicate that offending behaviour linked to alcohol, such as drunken driving, has decreased. Similarly, the role of alcohol in physical violence has decreased considerably over the period of two decades (Suonpää, Raeste and Saarteenoja 2024).

5. International comparisons

Making an international comparison of crime rates using administrative statistics is challenging, because legal crime definitions, counting rules, and control practices differ cross-nationally. Therefore, criminologists often prefer homicide statistics and crime surveys for the purposes of comparison.

Homicide

The Finnish homicide rate has traditionally been higher than is typical in the Nordic area and in Western Europe. Comparison with the other Nordic countries is particularly relevant due to social and cultural similarities, and it reveals that Finland has the highest rate of homicide in the Nordic area (Törölä 2024). In the Finnish homicide report of 2019, 73 per cent of the countries representing the European Economic Area had lower homicide mortality rates than Finland (Lehti 2020). The countries above the Finnish mortality rate were mostly from Eastern Europe.

Regarding trends, a recent study comparing the 1990s homicide drop in Finland with six other European countries found that the substantial drop was observed in all countries, and in both male and female victimisation (Suonpää et al. 2022). In Finland, the relative distribution of homicide types remained stable: the most common homicide type was alcohol-related conflict outside the criminal milieu for men, and family-related homicide for women, whereas homicides taking place within the criminal milieu remained exceptionally rare. The difference was stark with Switzerland, where the typical homicide victim is a woman killed by a family member, and with Sweden, where criminal milieu homicides of young males started

to increase in the 2010s.

A recent study of firearm homicide in Europe place Finland and Switzerland as outliers: in these countries, firearm availability is high, yet the prevalence of firearm homicide is relatively low compared to Europe overall (Krüsselmann et al. 2023).

Victim surveys

The International Crime Victim Surveys (ICVS) were started in 1988 and ended in 2005 (Dijk, Kesteren, and Smit 2007). Due to specific sampling difficulties, the results of the last survey, the so-called EU-ICVS conducted in 2003-5, are not reliable for Finland (Aromaa and Heiskanen 2006). The four sweeps from 1988 to 1999, with a core group of seven to 12 European countries participating, can be summarised briefly. These surveys suggest that the prevalence of assault or threats was higher than average in Finland. The proportion of countries manifesting lower violence prevalence ranged from 60 to 86 per cent in the four survey waves of 1988-1999 (Dijk, Kesteren, and Smit 2007). Personal theft victimisation yields a different picture. Except for the first survey wave in 1988, only a few (9-23 per cent) of the participating countries manifested lower theft victimisation percentages than Finland in the 1991-1999 survey waves. Thus, the ICVS appeared to indicate that Finland was comparatively high on violence and comparatively low on theft during the 1990s.

For theft, we lack more recent international adult victim surveys. In contrast, for violence, some surveys have been conducted. A recent Crime, Safety and Victims' Rights survey conducted by the European Fundamental Rights Agency showed physical violence victimisation rates in 29 European countries. The comparison placed Finland as the second most violent European nation (FRA 2021) after Estonia. Thus, in that survey on physical violence, the proportion of countries ranking lower than Finland was 96 per cent. For Finland, the ICVS sweeps of 1988-1999 and the FRA survey of 2021 both indicated a violence problem at a higher level than is typical in Europe, a finding consistent with homicide rates.

Some EU-wide surveys have been conducted that focus specifically on violence against women. An FRA survey collected in EU countries in 2012 showed high rates of violence

against women in Finland and other Nordic countries in comparison to other EU countries. In particular, the rates of both partner and non-partner violence were among the highest in Finland. (FRA 2021). Similar findings have been suggested by the ongoing Eurostat victim survey on violence against women (EU-GBV) collected between 2020 and 2023 in the EU countries. According to the current data of 30 European countries, Finland has above-average rates of violence against women. For instance, physical intimate partner violence was reported by 17 per cent of Finnish women, while the EU average was 9 per cent, with only 3 countries reporting higher rates. The corresponding figure for non-partner violence was 10 for Finland and 6 for EU average, placing Finland second highest in violence rates of the 30 countries. It is also noteworthy that the share of ever-partnered women reporting physical injuries from partner violence was comparatively high in Finland (Eurostat 2025). Although multiple sources indicate a comparatively high prevalence of violence against women in Finland, it is possible that these findings are at least partially attributable to methodological issues in data collection and other related factors (see Humbert et al. 2021). Alternative or supplementary hypotheses include high levels of equality placing women at greater risk of violence; and/or high levels of education expanding the perception of conflicts to be considered as violence, and hence reporting of incidents in surveys also being higher.

The Finnish Crimes Against Businesses survey of 2018 suggested that the Finnish retail sector suffers from a higher risk of shoplifting and violence against employees than its Dutch and UK counterparts (Saarikkomäki, Lehti, and Kivivuori 2019).

Youth crime surveys

Findings in adult populations cannot necessarily be generalised to youths. The most recent international criminological youth survey is the third sweep of the International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD-3), targeting 13–16-year-olds. Its report shows last year's crime prevalence rates for 22 European countries, with measurements in selected big cities between 2012 and 2015 (Enzmann et al. 2018). In that study, Finland's ranking varied according to different types of victimisations. In robbery victimisation, Finland had the highest prevalence

in Europe, while in assault victimisation, only 18 % of the comparison countries had lower victimisation prevalence than Finland. Thus, it appears that violent behaviour against youths in Finnish cities was expressed as robberies in 2012-2013. The offenders were typically slightly older youths, with over-representation among persons identified by the victims as being of non-Finnish origin (Kivivuori et al. 2014).

The Health Behaviour in School Aged Children survey (HBSC), operated by the World Health Organization, corroborates the low Finnish assault/violence victimisation prevalence. In 2018, only 12 per cent of the 43 comparison countries manifested a lower prevalence rate of fighting among 15-year-olds than Finland (Inchley et al. 2020).

In ISRD3, Finland also ranked relatively high in theft victimisation, as 86 per cent of the comparison countries had lower last-year prevalence. The same applied to hate crime victimisation (73 % of comparison countries with lower rates). Thus, with the exception of assault/violence, the Finnish youth victimisation rates have been above average in European comparison, as revealed by international self-report surveys.

Overall, comparative surveys among adults converge to suggest that violence and threats are more prevalent in Finland than could be predicted solely from living standards and the welfare state regime. At least in the 1990s, theft prevalence was below most comparison countries. It is unfortunate that the International Crime Victim Surveys were discontinued after 2005.

In contrast, Finnish youths do not appear to suffer from heightened risk of violence, except for robbery. Relatively high violence victimisation rates among adults, as suggested by international crime surveys, could also reflect methodological factors, such as more honest responding in victim surveys, or cultural factors, such as broader concepts of violence applied by the respondents (Kivivuori et al. 2014). However, homicide rate comparisons are consistent with survey-based findings on violence, thus validating each other. It appears to be possible to tentatively suggest that in European comparison, Finland's violence problem may also extend to non-lethal and 'everyday' violence among adults, but not among youths.

6. Crime prevention

In this section, we present an overview of Finnish crime prevention, with a focus on methods that have received support in robust research evaluations. We draw on the Finnish Crime prevention evaluation database FINPREV, in operation since 2016 (Beuker, Kivivuori, and Raeste 2024a, 2024b), and a recent systematic review on the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage on crime (Suonpää et al. 2023).

FINPREV database

Crime prevention methods developed and tested in one social and political context are not necessarily effective elsewhere. It is therefore necessary to conduct and replicate evaluations locally, where they are applied. The FINPREV database was created and is operated by the Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy (KRIMO), University of Helsinki, in cooperation with the Research and Education Division of the National Crime Prevention Council. Launched in 2016, the database compiles studies that empirically assess the effectiveness of crime prevention measures implemented in Finland. It includes research on projects/measures that aim to reduce crime and/or increase public safety. All types of interventions are included, from situational prevention to psycho-social treatment, social policy, and criminal justice sanctions.

The database includes empirical research studies published as articles as well as so-called grey literature (published government and institute reports, and so forth). Of the current original publications included in the database by the end of 2024, 23% were in English, while the rest were published in Finnish. The inclusion of studies is based on the willingness of researchers to include their studies in the database, using a structured online questionnaire

developed for this purpose. The database thus standardises the results of studies but does not offer a systematic review of them due to the self-selection of the studies.

The database currently (by the end of 2024) includes 35 evaluated measures, 27 of which are effects assessments of specific measures. Twenty-two of the effects evaluations used research designs at a Maryland 3 level or higher; the information given here is based on those evaluations.

Four measures have been found to be effective in preventing youth crime: (1) the KiVa Koulu bullying prevention programme, (2) the Anchor multiprofessional conferencing teams, targeting offenders under 18 years of age, (3) targeted police supervision of concentrations of high-risk youth engaged in leisure-time activities and (4) participation in secondary education (typically from 15 to 18 years of age).

The other measures supported by research evidence include: (5) opioid replacement treatment, (6) conditional prison terms, and (7) unconditional prison terms. Regarding fines, the studies indicate ambivalent effects: they seem to reduce traffic crimes but may be ineffective or counterproductive more generally. Note that the studies assessing ‘other measures’ did not specify age groups. Their interaction with age or effects among youths, young adults, or other age groups cannot be specified.

Overall, the effective crime prevention methods range from primary to secondary and tertiary measures; based on the studies included, it is not possible to prioritise any of the levels of intervention. More research evaluating effects is needed to assess the effects of crime prevention measures in specific national settings. In Finland, we still lack research on many types of interventions. In particular, little research has been done on social policy actions, community sanctions, and situational crime prevention. Very few of the included studies incorporated estimates of the costs of the intervention: only 26 per cent of all the studies discussed costs. Only one of them included a numerical estimation, whereas the majority only contained reflections on the matter.

Socioeconomic disadvantage and crime

Recently, (Suonpää et al. 2023) conducted a systematic review that aimed to assess the evidence on the causal impact of socioeconomic disadvantage on criminal behaviour and victimisation. The review identified 23 Nordic studies that met the methodological criteria for causal analysis. These studies measured socioeconomic disadvantage through multiple indicators: employment status (including job loss and active labor market programs), education, income levels, debt, and neighborhood characteristics.

The most compelling evidence highlighted the importance of employment and education. Job loss increased the risk of criminal behaviour and victimisation, while participation in employment or active labour market programmes reduced these outcomes. Similarly, expanded compulsory education decreased criminal behaviour, whereas limited educational access increased it. Most studies indicated that engagement in employment or education reduced crime through an incapacitation effect, limiting time and opportunities for criminal activity. These findings were robust for property crime but showed mixed results for violent crime. Therefore, the results suggest that both expanding compulsory education and increasing labour market participation may contribute to crime prevention.

The evidence for causal relationships between economic disadvantage or neighbourhood conditions and crime was limited. Therefore, current research does not support identifying these factors as primary causes of criminal behaviour. The observed statistical associations between low income or neighbourhood disadvantage and crime appear to be largely explained by individual characteristics that simultaneously increase the risks of socioeconomic and residential disadvantage, and criminal behaviour and victimisation. However, these conclusions should be interpreted with caution, as they are based on a limited number of causal studies, highlighting the need for additional research with strong causal designs.

Abbreviations

- **CVS** Child Victim Survey
- **FCBS** Finnish Crime against Businesses Survey
- **FCVS** Finnish Crime Victim Survey
- **FHM** Finnish homicide monitor
- **FINPREV** Finnish crime prevention evaluation database
- **FRA** European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
- **FSRD** Finnish Self-Report Delinquency Study
- **HBSC** Health Behaviour in School Aged Children
- **ICVS** International Crime Victim Surveys
- **SOCM** Statistics on Offences and Coercive Measures

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