

Chapter 2 A profile of assaults on public officers

The Council commissioned the Griffith Criminology Institute, Griffith University, to undertake a literature review focusing on the causes, frequency, and seriousness of assaults of public officers, as well as the impact of sentencing reforms aimed at addressing these types of assaults.

The following section of this chapter is a direct extract of the executive summary of this report,³ which can be found on the Council's website.

2.1 Literature review: executive summary

Over the past decade or so, there has been growing concern expressed about assaults on public officers, both by workers themselves as well as the public. Although Queensland, like other Australian jurisdictions, has an aggravated offence of serious assault when victims are public officers performing their professional duties, the questions about the adequacy of these laws continues to be questioned. In response to these unresolved concerns, in December 2019, the Queensland Government tasked the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council (QSAC) to examine and report on the penalties for assaults on police officers, other frontline emergency service workers, corrective services officers, public transport drivers and other types of public officers.

As part of this referral from the government, QSAC commissioned a literature review to identify and assess the *empirical* research evidence about:

- the incidence and context of (particularly the causes and contributing factors, as well as the frequency and seriousness) assaults on public officers;
- the impact of penalty and sentencing of assaults, sentencing frameworks and push for reforms, as well as the impact and outcome of these reforms on this type of offending.

A broad conceptualisation of “public officer” was used, including: those working at the frontline in the justice sector; those providing services in the public health sector; those working in state schools; and those providing public transit services. The literature review focuses on the state of knowledge based on available empirical research and does *not* include a jurisdictional overview of legislation and case law.

What do we know about the incidence of assaults on public officers?

Overall, estimates of the prevalence of, and trends in, assaults against public officers, are not easily made. Different data sources, different definitions of violence, and different time periods make it difficult to make comparisons between different types of public officers. Although the majority of studies focused on physical assault, there was a sufficient number of studies that defined workplace violence more broadly. In other words, more reliable studies are required to provide a robust empirical assessment of the extent of assaults against public officers.

With that limitation, the research suggests that, at least in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada:

- rates of the incidence of assault may be lowest among firefighters, and highest in the health and welfare sectors;
- the most common type of assault against public officers does *not* involve weapons or result in serious injury;

³ Christine Bond et al, *Assaults on Public Officers: A Review of Research Evidence* (Griffith Criminology Institute for Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council, March 2020) iii to vi.

- assaults in the workplace are more commonly *reported* by male staff than female staff, across a range of occupational groups.

Trends in the incidence of assaults against public officers are more difficult to assess, due to possible changes in reporting and the environment (in addition to methodological limitations). More recent research suggests that, at least for those in the justice sector, assaults against public officers may have declined. However, this may not be the case for those in the healthcare and welfare sector.

Research also suggests that assaults are *more* likely in particular circumstances or conditions, such as:

- perpetrators involved in substance abuse, *at least in the healthcare sector*;
- perpetrators with poor mental health, across a number of sectors;
- perpetrators with current or past history of violent behaviour;
- officers with less experience on the job;
- operational workplace characteristics, which may vary by sector (such as understaffing in the healthcare sector, and ticketing and timetabling issues in the public transit sector).

Although conclusions about the trends and extent of assaults against public officers are made tentatively, the impact of these assaults on both victims and organisation should not be overlooked. For victims, research documents detrimental impacts such as: negative consequences for emotional and physical well-being; decreased connectedness to the organisation; lack of a desire to remain in the occupation; and reduced job performance, including increased errors. However, the extent of the organisational costs – such as lost productivity and high staff turn-over – of these assaults has been largely understudied, especially outside the health sector and the United States. A 2011 Australian study of accepted workers' compensation claims made by police officers estimated an average of 587 work hours per claim (ranging from claims for one hour to over 11, 840 hours) was lost due to injuries caused by the broader category of occupational violence.

What do we know about the sentencing of assaults on public officers?

The Griffith Criminology Institute's literature review also addresses the issue of penalty enhancements or mandatory minimum sentencing schemes for assaults against public officers in common law jurisdictions and the justifications for, and evidence regarding effectiveness of, such schemes. The findings of this review are discussed in Chapter 9 (Offence and sentencing framework: issues and options).

The conclusion reached is:

although amendments to sentencing frameworks can clearly communicate the unacceptability of the behaviour, prevention strategies may be a better strategy for reducing the incidence of assaults against public officers. In other words, well-targeted interventions may achieve more in terms of reducing the incidence of these assaults.

Prevention strategies, reproduced from the Griffith University's literature review, are discussed in section 2.1.1 below.

2.1.1 Prevention strategies

The types of interventions that have been discussed in research fall into three groups:

- focusing on the *relationship of the officer with the "client"* (e.g. appropriate risk assessment tools, training in skills to de-escalate interactions, clearer instructions and policies for the public).

- focusing on the *workplace environment* (e.g. physical barriers, the organisation of the workplace, public awareness/education posters, surveillance technology).
- focusing on the *relationship of the officer with the organisation* (e.g. simpler and clearer internal reporting processes, supportive management, a culture of safety).

The under-reporting of workplace assaults by victims complicates the identification and implementation appropriate responses and strategies. The reasons for under-reporting are not dissimilar to those found in other victimisation contexts. However, from the small number of studies available, particular barriers to reporting include: confusing internal reporting process; lack of internal support after the assault; dissatisfaction with the response of managers to an incident; and minimisation of the significance of the incident due to the nature of the perpetrator (e.g. may have poor mental health).

Nevertheless, more work is needed to better identify the types of interventions that will be most successful in minimising assaults, as well as an investment in rigorous evaluations to assess the conditions of success of these interventions. We should expect that the most effective interventions may vary by location and sector.

2.2 Frequency of assaults on public officers

While assessing the seriousness of offending requires a complex and multifaceted approach, for the purpose of this review, only limited analysis was feasible due to time constraints and data availability. This chapter reports on the frequency of assaults against different groups of public officers.

As highlighted in the Griffith University literature review, the findings of which are summarised above, certain occupational groups are less likely to report assaults committed against them. Public officers working in care professions, including health care, education, and emergency response sectors, under-report assaults committed against them as the professional orientation of these professions inhibits reporting. For example, some professionals may view occupational violence as ‘part of their job’.⁴ The issue of under-reporting is expanded at the beginning of Chapter 8 of this paper.

The Council obtained data from a range of public sector agencies on the number of incidents reported internally which involved the assault of a public officer from 2014–15 to 2018–19. Further data was obtained from WorkCover Queensland on the number of accepted claims which involved the assault of a public officer. These figures are displayed in Table 2-1 below.

⁴ Ibid [3.2].

A conversion rate was calculated by dividing the number of accepted WorkCover claims by the number of incidents reported by each agency. Employees in the health sector had the lowest conversion rate, with only 6.1 per cent of reported incidents resulting in an accepted WorkCover claim. The Queensland Ambulance Service had a conversion rate of 12.0 per cent – twice that of Queensland Health, but comparatively low in relation to other agencies. Police officers had a higher conversion rate, with 33.7 per cent of reported incidents leading to an accepted WorkCover claim. Similarly, corrective services officers also had a higher conversion rate, with 36.0 per cent of incidents resulting in an accepted claim.

Table 2-1: Number of reported incidents and accepted WorkCover claims for assaults of public officers, 2014–15 to 2018–19

Agency	Reported Incidents	Accepted WorkCover claims	Conversion rate
Queensland Health	34,844	2,109	6.1%
Queensland Ambulance Service	1,656	199	12.0%
Queensland Fire and Emergency Service	19	3	15.8%
Queensland Police Service – Police Officers	9,103	3,064	33.7%
Queensland Corrective Services – Prison staff* (2018–19 only)	333	120	36.0%
Youth Justice – Detention centre staff* (2018–19 only)	121	19	15.7%

Source: Incident data provided by individual agencies – unpublished data, 2014–15 to 2018–19. Claims data provided by WorkCover Queensland – unpublished data, 2014–15 to 2018–19.

Note: Incident data from different agencies is sourced from different administrative systems and may not be directly comparable. Incident data from Queensland Corrective Services and Youth Justice reflects the number of incidents recorded in prison and detention facilities involving a staff member. Data from the Queensland Police Service reflects the number of assaults of on-duty police officers that were charged. Data from Queensland Health, Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Fire and Emergency Service reflects the number of incidents involving the assault of a staff member that were reported internally.

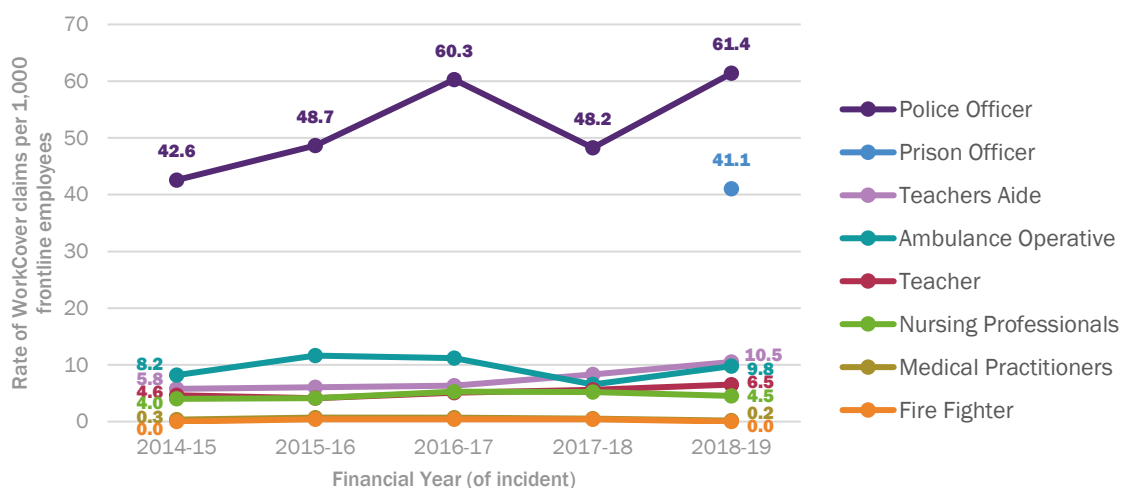
* Due to Machinery-Of-Government changes, only includes data from 2018–19.

The number of accepted WorkCover claims can provide an indication of which public sector agencies are affected by assaults. However, due to differences in reporting rates between different professions (discussed above) some occupational groups may under-report more so than others. The amount of harm caused may also affect the number of claims accepted by WorkCover; that is, assaults that result in medical costs or time off work may be more likely to result in a WorkCover claim. Table A4–1 in Appendix 4 provides a breakdown of the number of accepted WorkCover claims by agency and occupation from 2014–15 to 2018–19. It is important to note that some occupational groups have many more employees compared to other occupational groups. As such, data between agencies is not comparable. For comparable data, refer to Figure 2-1 below which reports the number of accepted WorkCover claims reported as a rate of workers employed in those roles.

In 2018–19, the Queensland Police Service (QPS), Department of Education, and Department of Health reported the highest number of accepted WorkCover claims resulting from an assault of a staff member (n=742, 634, and 368 respectively, excluding guards and security officers). Queensland Corrective Services, and the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women also reported a large number of accepted WorkCover claims (n=137, and 120 respectively, excluding guards and security officers). Guards and security officers accounted for 61 claims, across a range of agencies. While the number of assaults in other agencies (such as the Queensland Ambulance Service) were relatively low, it is important to note there are also fewer workers employed in these agencies – see Figure 2-1 for further context.

Figure 2-1 shows the rate of accepted WorkCover claims per 1,000 employees, where the claim was the result of the assault of a public officer. Police officers had the highest rate, which has increased over the past 5 years, from 42.6 claims per 1,000 officers in 2014–15 to 61.4 claims per 1,000 officers in 2018–19. Prison officers (of both adult prison and juvenile detention centres) had the second highest rate of claims, with 41.1 accepted WorkCover claims per 1,000 officers in 2018–19. The remaining occupational groups for which data was available were relatively low in comparison. There were 9.8 accepted WorkCover claims per 1,000 ambulance operatives in 2018–19. Teachers’ aides had a rate of 10.5 claims per 1,000 employees in 2018–19, which was higher than the rate of 6.5 for teachers.

Figure 2-1: Rate of accepted WorkCover claims per 1,000 employees for assault of public officers, 2014–15 to 2018–19



Source: Claims data provided by WorkCover – unpublished data, 2014–15 to 2018–19. Rates calculated from the number of frontline workers as provided by the Queensland Public Service Commission – unpublished data, 2014–15 to 2018–19.

Note: Prison officers were not identified as a discrete group prior to 2018–19.

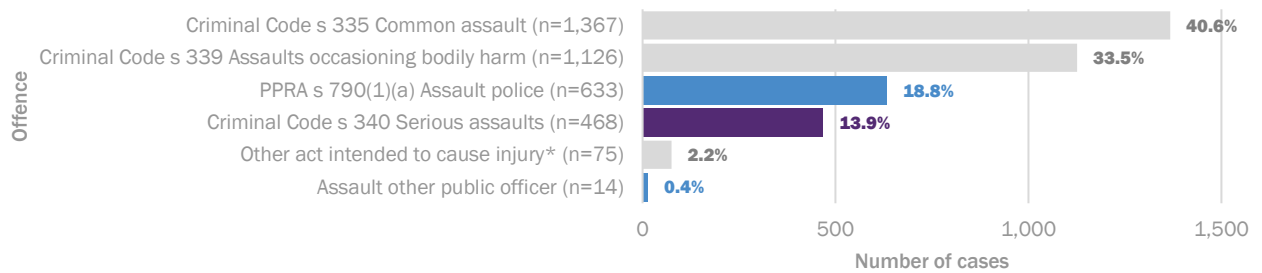
2.3 Sentenced acts intended to cause injury

As discussed above, not all cases involving the assault of a public officer are reported. Even fewer cases proceed to a WorkCover claim, or result in criminal charges. The remainder of this chapter discusses those cases which resulted in a conviction for an offence sentenced by a Queensland Court.

The Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification (ANZSOC) is used to classify offences into broad categories for statistical purposes. To ascertain the prevalence of serious assaults, Figure 2-2 shows a breakdown of all offences falling within the broad offence category of ‘acts intended to cause injury’. This category includes offences which cause non-fatal injury or harm to another person where there is no sexual or acquisitive element and includes offences such as common assault and assaults occasioning bodily harm (AOBH). As the ANZSOC classification is a national classification, its broad categories may not always account for the elements of offences as they exist in individual jurisdictions. As such, it is important to note that in the Queensland context, some offences which are classified under ‘acts intended to cause injury’ do not actually require an ‘intent’ to injure, and the classification might more accurately be thought of as ‘assaults which cause harm’.

Assaults against a public officer make up a substantial proportion of all acts intended to cause injury sentenced in Queensland Courts — see Figure 2-2. Assault of a police officer under section 790 of the *Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000* (Qld) ('PPRA') accounted for 18.8 per cent of all acts intended to cause injury. An additional 13.9 per cent of cases involved a serious assault. A further 0.4 per cent of cases involved the assault of a public officer under a different legislative provision. Note that the data in this figure is limited to offences sentenced from 20 September 2018, as prior to this date section 790 of the PPRA did not clearly distinguish between 'assault' and 'obstruction' of a police officer.

Figure 2-2: Number of sentenced cases involving an 'act intended to cause injury'



Data includes: Higher and lower courts, adult and juvenile cases sentenced in 2018–19 where the offence was committed on or after 20 September 2018 (following the amendments to s 790 PPRA).

Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019.

Notes: Totals will add to more than 100%, as a case will be counted multiple times if it contains multiple offences.

For the purposes of this analysis, some offences were recoded from the offence classification of 'resist or hinder government official' to 'acts intended to cause injury'. These included:

- the serious assault of a public officer (Criminal Code s 340(2AA));
- the assault or obstruction of a corrective services officer (*Corrective Services Act 2006* s 124(b));
- the assault or obstruction of a watch-house officer (*Police Power and Responsibilities Act 2000* s 655A); and
- resisting a public officer (Criminal Code s 199).

* Offences with fewer than 30 cases were grouped as 'other act intended to cause injury', these include offences such as unlawful stalking (n=27), wounding (n=21), strangulation (n=15), grievous bodily harm (n=5) and others.

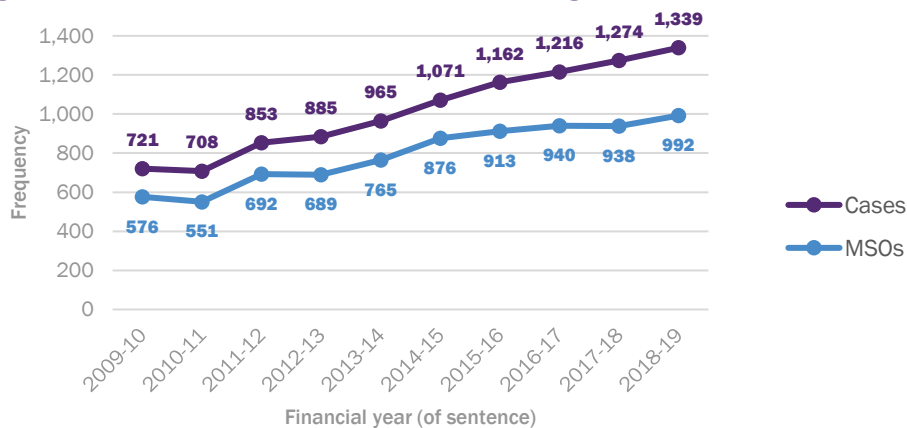
2.4 Serious assault trends

9,061 OFFENDERS SENTENCED FOR
SERIOUS ASSAULT
IN THE PAST 10 YEARS

7,932 CASES
WHERE SERIOUS ASSAULT WAS THE
MOST SERIOUS OFFENCE

Overall, the total number of sentenced cases involving a serious assault under section 340 of the *Criminal Code* has increased over the past 10 years. From 721 cases in 2009–10 to 1,339 cases in 2018–19, an increase of 85.7 per cent – see Figure 2-3. The chart below includes all cases involving a serious assault, regardless of whether the serious assault was the most serious offence (MSO).

Figure 2-3: Number of sentenced cases involving a serious assault over time



Data includes: Higher and lower courts, adult and juvenile cases sentenced between 2009–10 and 2018–19.
Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019.

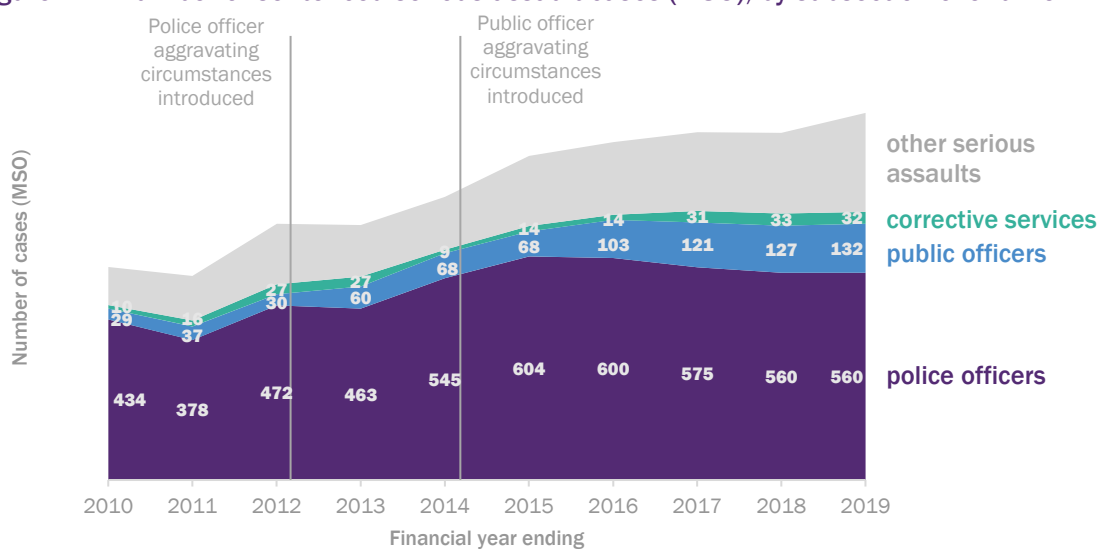
Figure 2-4 (below) provides a breakdown of the types of serious assault over time.

The number of serious assaults of a police officer increased by 39.2 per cent from 2009–10 to 2014–15; however, since 2014–15, the number of serious assaults involving a police officer as the victim has declined by 7.3 per cent.

The QPS Violent Confrontations Review, undertaken by QPS following five fatal police shootings in 2013–14, observed a 15.2 per cent reduction of all reported assaults of on-duty police officers between 2012 and 2014. The review identified the increased use of ‘accoutrements (O/C Spray, Taser and firearms) which are traditionally deployed from a greater distance between the subject and police officer’ as a possible contributing factor.⁵

The number of assaults of public officers more than quadrupled over the data period, from 29 cases (MSO) in 2009–10 to 132 in 2018–19. Over the same period, the number of employees in the public sector increased by 18.8 per cent.

Figure 2-4: Number of sentenced serious assault cases (MSO), by subsection over time



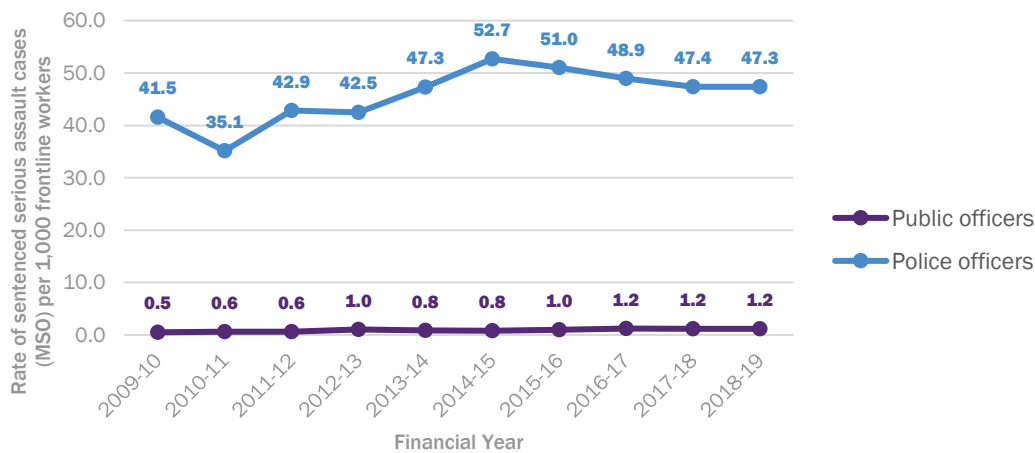
Data includes: Higher and lower courts, adult and juvenile cases (MSO) sentenced between 2009–10 and 2018–19. Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019.

Note: ‘Other’ includes offences charged under sections 340(1)(a) (assault with intent to commit a crime or to resist arrest/detention; n= 169); 340(1)(c)–(d) (assault any person who is performing, or has performed a public duty; n=220), 340(1)(f) (unlawful conspiracy in trade; n=1), 340(1)(g) (assault of a person 60 years and over; n=1,329), and 340(1)(h) (assault of a person with a disability; n=32), as well as serious assaults which are not further defined (n=2)

⁵ Queensland Police Service, Violent Confrontations Review Team, Operational Capability Command, *QPS Violent Confrontations Review* (undated) <<https://www.police.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-12/QPS%20Violent%20Confrontations%20Review.pdf>> 23.

The decrease in serious assaults against police officers in recent years is even more notable considering the number of police officers in Queensland has increased by 3.2 per cent over the same period (2014–15 to 2018–19). Figure 2-5 shows the rate of sentenced serious assault cases per 1,000 frontline employees. In 2014–15, there were 52.7 sentenced cases involving the assault of a police officer (MSO) per 1,000 officers, this rate reduced to 47.3 in 2018–19. Over the same time period, the rate of assaults of public officers increased a very small amount, from 0.8 sentenced cases per 1,000 frontline workers in 2014–15 to 1.2 in 2018–19.

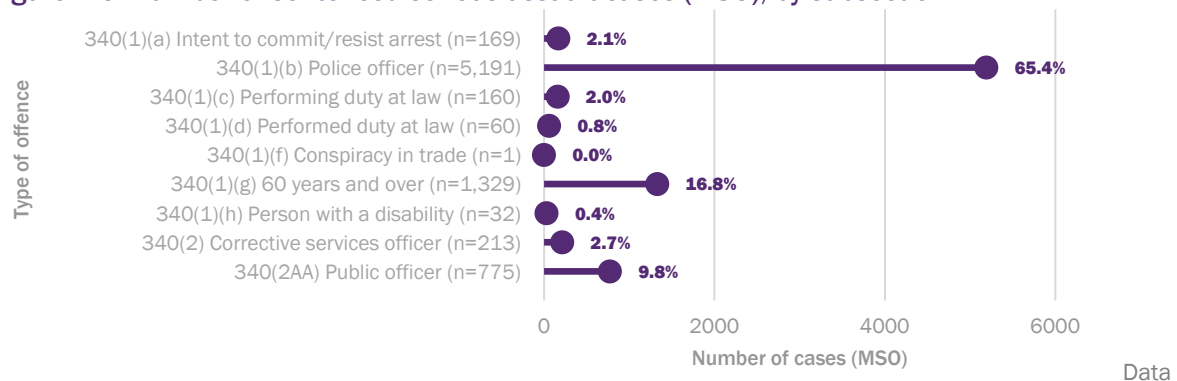
Figure 2-5: Rate of sentenced serious assault cases (MSO) per 1,000 frontline employees over time



Data includes: Higher and lower courts, adult and juvenile cases (MSO) sentenced between 2009–10 and 2018–19. Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019. Rates calculated from the number of frontline workers provided by the Queensland Public Service Commission – unpublished data, 2014–15 to 2018–19. Note: Public officers includes serious assaults of corrective services officers under s 340(2), public officers under s 340(2AA), and those performing or who performed a duty imposed at law under s 340(1)(c) and s 340(1)(d).

The serious assault of a police officer was, by far, the most common type of serious assault, accounting for 65.4 per cent of cases sentenced under section 340. The second most frequently sentenced type of serious assault involved people aged 60 years and over (16.8%). Public officers were the third largest category (9.8%). The remaining types of serious assault only account for small percentages of all serious assault cases, including cases involving a serious assault charge under sections 340(1)(c) (assault of a person performing a duty at law) and 340(1)(d) (assault of a person who has performed a duty at law), as well as 340(2) assault of a working corrective services officers at a corrective services facility.

Figure 2-6: Number of sentenced serious assault cases (MSO), by subsection



includes: Higher and lower courts, adult and juvenile cases (MSO) sentenced between 2009–10 and 2018–19. Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019.

2.5 Serious assault of public officers

While the offence of serious assault (s 340 of the *Criminal Code*) extends to a variety of different types of victims, including people 60 years and over and people with a disability, this section of the report focuses solely on cases involving the assault of a police officer, corrective services officer or public officer (including offences charged under ss 340(1)(c)–(d)).

The vast majority of cases involving serious assault of a public officer over the data period were sentenced in the Magistrates Courts (82.8%, n=6,847) – see Table 2-2. The remaining 17.2 per cent of cases were heard in the higher courts (District and Supreme Courts) (n=1,427).

Table 2-2: Number of serious assaults of a public officer, by type of court

Court Level	Charges	Offenders	Cases	MSO
Magistrates	9,073 (80.1%)	6,185 (84.1%)	6,847 (82.8%)	5,540 (86.6%)
District	2,158 (19.1%)	1,307 (17.8%)	1,361 (16.4%)	854 (13.3%)
Supreme	93 (0.8%)	65 (0.9%)	66 (0.8%)	5 (0.1%)
Total	11,324 (100.0%)	7,354 (100.0%)	8,274 (100.0%)	6,399 (100.0%)

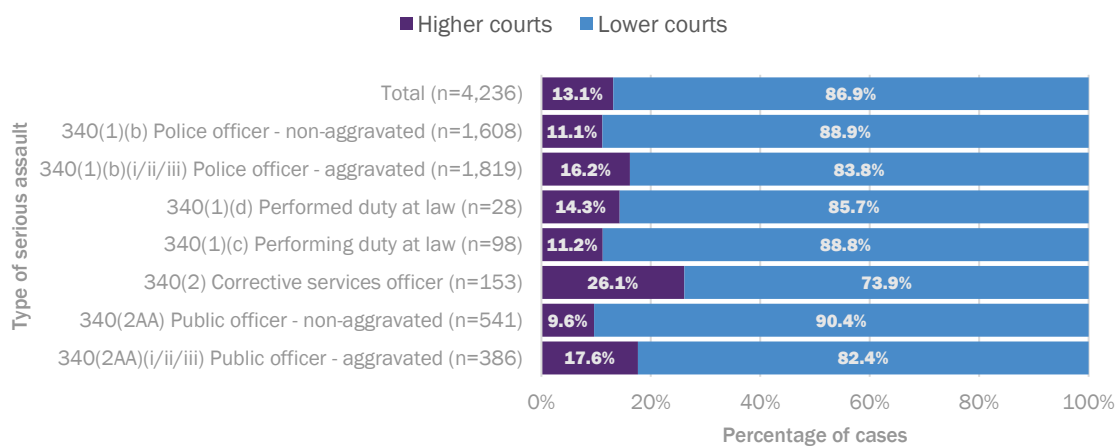
Data includes: Adult and juvenile cases sentenced between 2009–10 and 2018–19.

Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019.

Note: Includes serious assaults that involved a public officer, including: s 340(1)(b) Police officers, s 340(1)(c) person performing a duty imposed by law, s 340(1)(d) person who performed a duty imposed by law, s 340(2) corrective services officers, s 340(2AA) public officers.

While most cases involving a serious assault are heard in the Magistrates Courts, some types of serious assault are more likely to be dealt with in the higher courts compared to others. Serious assaults of working corrective services officer by prisoners who are either in prison or on parole, are the most likely type of serious assault to be sentenced in the higher courts (26.1%). The non-aggravated assault of a public officer are the least likely type of serious assault to be dealt with by the higher courts, with 90.4 per cent of these cases sentenced in the Magistrates Courts – see Figure 2-7.

Figure 2-7: Proportion of serious assault of a public officer cases by offence type



Data includes: Adult and juvenile cases sentenced between 2014–15 and 2018–19 where the offence was committed on or after 5 September 2014.

Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019.

2.6 Demographics of offenders sentenced for serious assault of a public officer

The majority of offenders sentenced for the serious assault of a public officer (MSO) under section 340 of the *Criminal Code* were male (69.6%), non-Indigenous (62.0%) and relatively young (median age=26.5 years).

The figures below compare the demographic profile of offenders who were sentenced for the serious assault of a public officer, compared to the demographic profile of all offenders sentenced for an act intended to cause injury. Female offenders were more likely to be sentenced for a serious assault (30.4%) compared to other acts intended to cause injury (23.7%).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders were also more likely to be sentenced for a serious assault (38.0%), than an act intended to cause injury offence (32.2%). The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders sentenced for an act intended to cause injury was also much higher than the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders sentenced for other types of offences (18.5%).

The median age of offenders who were sentenced for a serious assault was slightly younger (26.5 years) compared to other acts intended to cause injury (27.0 years), and also younger than the average age of offenders across all sentenced offences (29.2 years).

Serious assault of a public officer

30.4%

female

38.0%

Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander

26.5

Median age

All acts intended to cause injury

23.7%

female

32.2%

Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander

27.0

Median age

All sentenced offences

24.4%

female

18.5%

Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander

29.2

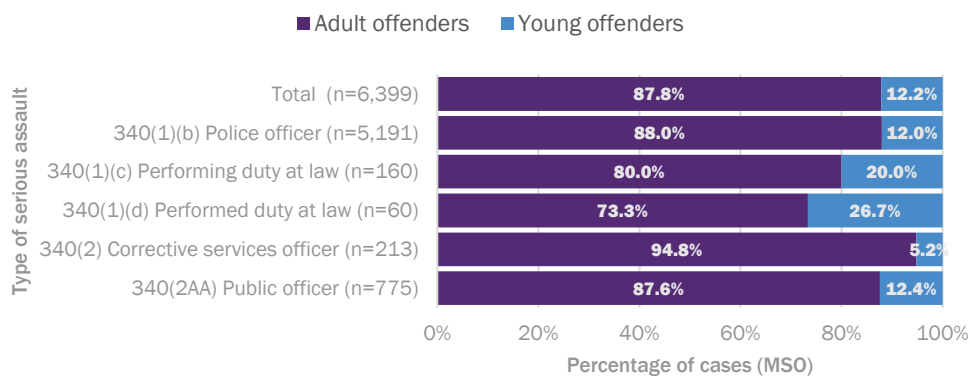
Median age

Data includes: Higher and lower courts, adult and juvenile cases (MSO), sentenced between 2009–10 and 2018–19, excludes cases where demographic data is unknown.

Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019.

Over the period 2009–10 to 2018–19, 12.2 per cent of offenders sentenced for the serious assault of a public officer were young offenders who were sentenced under the *Youth Justice Act 1992 (Qld)* (n=778). The proportion of young offenders was higher for assaults of people who performed, or were performing, a duty imposed at law (26.7% and 20.0% respectively) – see Figure 2-8.

Figure 2-8: Percentage of young offenders sentenced for serious assault (MSO)








Data includes: Higher and lower court cases (MSO), sentenced between 2009–10 and 2018–19.
Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019.

2.7 Associated offences

2.7.1 Cases where serious assault of a public officer was not the most serious offence

In the 2,829 cases involving the serious assault of a public officer where the serious assault was not the MSO, the MSO most commonly was AOBH (n=438, 15.5%) or burglary (n=184, 6.5%) – see Figure 2-9.

Figure 2-9: Top 5 MSOs in cases where serious assault of a public officer was not the MSO

Offence	Cases
 Assaults occasioning bodily harm <i>Criminal Code (Qld) s 339</i>	438 (15.5%)
 Burglary <i>Criminal Code (Qld) s 419</i>	184 (6.5%)
 Assault or obstruct police officer <i>Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000 s 790</i>	123 (4.3%)
 Dangerous operation of a vehicle <i>Criminal Code (Qld) s 328A</i>	113 (4.0%)
 Robbery <i>Criminal Code (Qld) s 411</i>	96 (3.4%)









Data includes: Higher and lower courts, adult and juvenile cases (MSO), sentenced between 2009–10 and 2018–19.
Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019.

2.7.2 Cases where serious assault of a public officer was the most serious offence

The offence most commonly sentenced alongside serious assault (MSO) was the assault or obstruction of a police officer under section 790 of the PPRA (n=2,801, 27.5% of cases). The offence of public nuisance was sentenced alongside serious assault (MSO) in 18.0 per cent of cases (n=1,832).

Wilful damage, under section 469 of the *Criminal Code*, was another offence that was often sentenced alongside the serious assault of a public officer (MSO) (n=1,143, 11.2%).

Figure 2-10: Top eight associated offences sentenced with the serious assault of a public officer (MSO)

Offence	Cases
 Assault or obstruct police officer <i>Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000 s 790</i>	2,801 (27.5%)
 Public nuisance <i>Summary Offences Act 2005 s 6</i>	1,832 (18.0%)
 Wilful damage <i>Criminal Code (Qld) s 469</i>	1,143 (11.2%)
 Breach of bail – failure to appear <i>Bail Act 1980 s 33</i>	621 (6.1%)
 Possessing dangerous drugs <i>Drugs Misuse Act 1986 s 9</i>	580 (5.7%)
 Breach bail condition <i>Bail Act 1980 s 29</i>	577 (5.7%)
 Stealing <i>Criminal Code (Qld) s 398</i>	560 (5.5%)
 Contravene direction of police officer <i>Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000 s 791</i>	522 (5.1%)

Data includes: Higher and lower courts, adult and juvenile cases (MSO), sentenced between 2009–10 and 2018–19. Source: QGSO, Queensland Treasury – Courts Database, extracted November 2019.

The analysis of associated offences clearly indicates that serious assaults are frequently committed in conjunction with other police officer-specific assault/obstruct offences, public order offences, offences relating to breaches of bail conditions, and drug offences.

2.8 Summary

Data from the public sector shows a variety of different types of workers that are affected by assaults in the workplace; from police officers to paramedics, teachers to health professionals. The type of assault, and circumstances of offending behaviour varies substantially between different occupational groups.⁶

Assaults against public officers have a significant impact on victims, including reduced job performance, and consequences for the organisation as a whole, such as lowered productivity and difficulties in retaining staff.⁷ These issues are explored further in Chapter 8 of this report.

Factors relating to the perpetrator, the staff member and situational factors were identified which impact on the prevalence of assaults of public officers. Perpetrators with drug or alcohol problems, mental health issues, or a history of violence were more likely to assault a public officer.⁸ Staff-centric factors such as gender and level of experience affected the likelihood of assault.⁹ Finally,

⁶ Bond et al (n 3) [2.1.2].

⁷ Ibid [3.2.1].

⁸ Ibid [2.2.1].

⁹ Ibid [2.2.2].

situational factors, such as frequent contact with clients and overcrowded environments lead to more assaults.¹⁰

The analysis of offences commonly sentenced alongside the serious assault of a public officer suggests that serious assaults commonly occur in conjunction with offences related to the obstruction of a police officer, public order offences, and/or breaches of justice procedures.

The demographic breakdown of offenders shows there is a higher proportion of female offenders sentenced for serious assaults compared to other acts intended to cause injury. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprised a higher proportion of serious assaults, compared to other categories of offences. The age of offenders sentenced for a serious assault was somewhat younger than the age of offenders for other types of offences.

Overall, the number of accepted WorkCover claims for the assault of a public officer increased over the past five years. Police officers have the highest rate of claims, followed by corrective services officers.

Over the past 10 years, the number of sentenced cases involving a serious assault of a public officer has increased considerably. However, when expressed as a rate of cases per the number of frontline workers, the rate is a lot less significant. The majority of cases sentenced under section 340 involved the serious assault of a police officer, although the number of serious assaults of police officers has decreased slightly in recent years.

¹⁰ Ibid [2.2.3].