

New Zealand Police Association ICPRA CONFERENCE 2010

Violence Against Police in New Zealand

There is a widespread perception that violence against police officers is increasing in New Zealand.

This perception is backed up both by the official statistics, by the Police Associations surveys of members, and by anecdotal reports. In particular, a surge in firearms related incidents is fuelling calls for general arming of New Zealand Police.

Use of firearms against police

Increasing violence can be seen both in increased incidence of assaults on police, assaults with weapons, and the use of firearms against police. In the 18 months from September 2008, seven New Zealand Police officers were shot. Two were killed and five were wounded, two gravely.

In summary the incidents were:

- Sergeant Don Wilkinson, fatally shot, 11 September 2008 while installing a tracking device in a covert anti-drugs operation. Wilkinson's partner, shot and wounded in the same incident. Drug related.
- Senior Constable Len Snee, fatally shot, 7 May 2009 during exercise of a drugs search warrant at a private residence during mid-morning. Senior Constables Bruce Miller and Grant Diver, shot and wounded in the same incident. Drug related.
- A member of the Christchurch AOS, shot and wounded, 28 June 2009 while responding to an unprovoked shooter holed up in his private residence. The offender was eventually shot and killed.
- Constable Jeremy Snow, shot and wounded, 21 December 2009 while investigating a suspicious vehicle late at night. Drug related.

Previously, shootings of police officers were extremely rare. These were the first incidents since an officer was killed, and another wounded in 2002. An officer had earlier been shot dead in 1996.

New Zealand Police access to firearms

New Zealand police officers do not routinely carry firearms. Policy dictates that general duties staff may only access a firearm in response to a particular threat. While some incident cars in some districts have rifles in locked boxes in the vehicle boot for this purpose, usually staff are required to return to a station to access firearms.

The role of general duties staff, on arming themselves, is simply to cordon and contain an incident unless specialist Armed Offenders Squad support arrives. While Glock 17 handguns are available, there is a policy preference towards Bushmaster (M-4) rifles for this purpose.

Police have in recent years been pursuing a training policy which will see even more emphasis placed on specialist squads to provide firearms capability. This includes reducing firearms training for most staff, but ceasing training on the Glock and

eliminating firearms training entirely for many staff. At the same time, a specialist Critical Response Vehicle model is being trailed – similar in concept to the UK's Armed Response Vehicles.

The Police Association has campaigned for better firearms access for general duties staff, so that firearms are more available as a 'last resort' option for self-defence and the defence of others. The Glock is a more suitable weapon for this purpose.

Tasers are currently being rolled out in New Zealand. The Taser, whilst useful, is not suitable in all situations of imminent threat to life. In addition, these are not personal issue items and are not routinely carried either. The routinely carried tactical options tools remain oleoresin capsicum (OC) spray, and an extendable (ASP) baton.

Assaults and threats

Official Police statistics show that assaults on police officers have increased 32% in the last 10 years (1999-2009). Within that total, serious assaults (Crimes Act assaults) have increased 114%; and assaults with weapons 79%, and assaults with firearms 215%. Detailed statistics are annexed to this document.

Increases in serious violence and especially assaults with weapons against police appear to outstrip increases in general violence. Total recorded violent offences are up 57% over the period, with total recorded assaults up 49%, and serious assaults up 65%.

While recorded violence in society at large has also been trending up over the same period, official analysis of the statistics by Police maintains that the vast majority of this increase has been due to better reporting and recording of domestic violence offending, rather than general violence such as street assaults.

The official statistics are backed up by survey results on assaults and threats.

2008 Members' survey: Nielsen for Police Association

Threats

- Forty-seven percent (47%) of all constabulary (sworn) members were threatened with a weapon other than a firearm at least once while on duty during the previous year.
- Seven percent (7%) were threatened at least once with a firearm.
- GDB frontline staff faced even higher incidence of threats – with eleven percent (11%) threatened with a firearm and sixty-seven percent (67%) threatened at least once with any other weapon.
- More than one-third of members (36%) who were threatened said they did not report the incident.

2005 comparison

- The Association's last members' survey was done in 2005, and on that occasion members were asked to recall incidents where they were threatened with a firearm or any other weapon over the previous three-year period. In 2005, fourteen percent (14%) of constables indicated they had been threatened with a firearm over a three-year period, compared with seven percent (7%) in the one-year period asked about in 2008. This indicates an increase in the incidence of threats with firearms.
- The 2005 survey found that fifty-two percent (52%) of constables had been threatened with a weapon other than a firearm over the previous three years, while

forty-seven percent (47%) in the 2008 survey indicated a threat over the last year alone.

Assaults

- Forty-three percent (43%) of constables said they had been attacked at least once by an offender in the last year.
- Thirteen percent (13%) assaulted three or more times.
- One in five said they were injured by an offender at least once while on duty last year.
- Rates of assault and injury were highest amongst GDB frontline staff, with sixty-six percent (66%) saying they were attacked once or more by an offender in the last year, and thirty-three percent (33%) being injured.

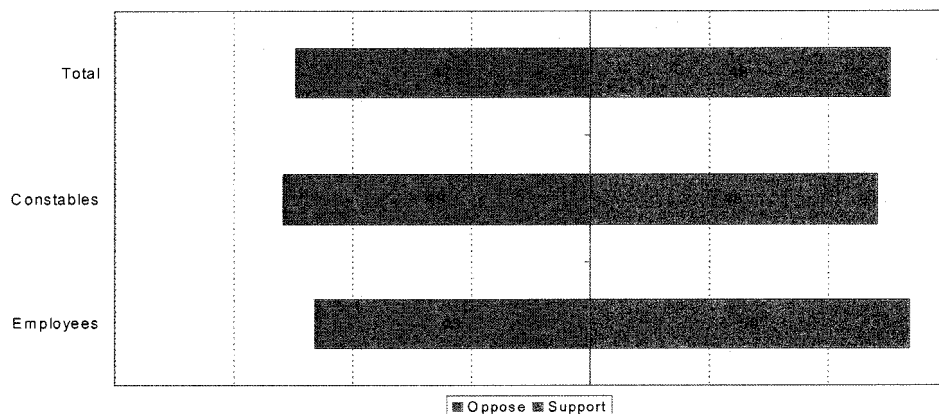
Police and public attitudes to arming

The increasing violence against police officers is beginning to have an impact on the attitudes of the New Zealand public, and police officers, towards the question of whether to become a generally armed or more routinely armed police service.

Police attitudes to arming

2008 Members' survey: Nielsen for Police Association

Do you support or oppose the general arming of police with firearms?



- Total support 48%; total oppose 47%. Constables support 46%; oppose 49%. Employees support 50%; oppose 43%.
- Road policing (55%) and GDB frontline (54%) staff are more likely to be in support of general arming with firearms. Support is also higher among members who have been in the NZ Police for four years or less (58%).
- Administration, planning and support staff (61%), GDB community relations (60%) and CIB (58%) staff are more likely to be opposed to the general arming of police with firearms. This is also the case with members who have been in the NZ Police for more than 15 years (57%).

- There is higher support amongst members who have been in a situation where an offender has been injured (50% support), have been attacked by an offender (53% support), injured by an offender (54% support), threatened with any other weapon (54% support) and in particular those who have been threatened with a firearm (65% support).

2005 Members' survey: UMR for Police Association

- Although the question wording was slightly different, compared to the 2005 research there appears to have been a shift among members towards greater support of arming police. In 2005, just over a quarter (26%) of constables (sworn) and 34% of non-sworn staff supported the *general arming of police*, while in 2008, these figures were 46% and 50% respectively in support of the *general arming of police with firearms*.

2003 Members' survey: UMR for Police Association

- A majority (64%) were opposed to the carrying of guns. 31% were in favour and 5% were unsure.

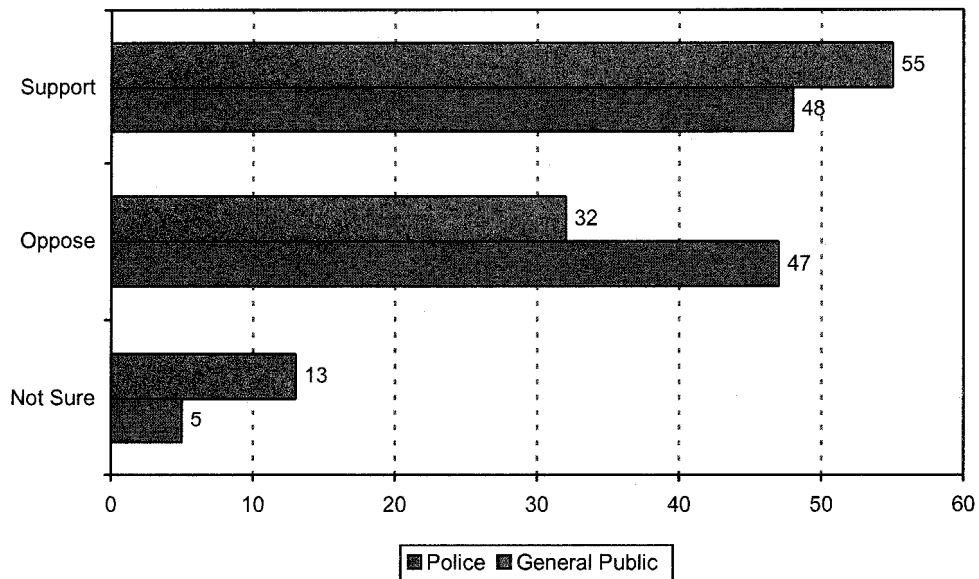
Public attitudes to arming

2010 survey: Nielsen online for NZ Herald

- 31% of the 2296 Herald Readers' Panel respondents supported allowing all police to carry firearms at all times. 65% believed only the armed offenders squad should carry guns, showing strong support for current police practice. 1.2% believed police should not be armed in any circumstances, and 3% were unsure.
- Note this was not a survey of a random NZ population sample.

2008 survey: Nielsen for Police Association

Do you support or oppose the general arming of police with firearms?



- Public support 55%; oppose 32%; not sure 13%. The public is more clearly in favour of arming than police themselves are.

2008 survey: Research New Zealand

How much do you approve or disapprove of the Police carrying guns?

- Total approve: 53%
- Total disapprove: 34%
- Neither/don't know: 14%

2003 survey: UMR for Police Association

- Results amongst the general public were almost identical as for police, at 33% support, 61% opposition.

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Official Police statistics: Assaults on Police to end 2008-09

Fiscal Year	Crimes Act			Total Assaults on Police		
	Assaults	Change	Other Assaults	Change	Police	Change
1998/99	193		1,685		1,878	
1999/00	216	11.9%	1,749	3.8%	1,965	4.6%
2000/01	210	-2.8%	1,787	2.2%	1,997	1.6%
2001/02	250	19.0%	1,900	6.3%	2,150	7.7%
2002/03	252	0.8%	1,820	-4.2%	2,072	-3.6%
2003/04	284	12.7%	1,769	-2.8%	2,053	-0.9%
2004/05	298	4.9%	1,571	-11.2%	1,869	-9.0%
2005/06	331	11.1%	1,792	14.1%	2,123	13.6%
2006/07	393	18.7%	1,855	3.5%	2,248	5.9%
2007/08	460	17.0%	1,924	3.7%	2,384	6.0%
2008/09	412	-10.4%	2,069	7.5%	2,481	4.1%
Change 99-09		113.5%		22.8%		32.1%

Fiscal Year	Firearms		Total	
	Change	Weapon	Change	Change
1998/99	13		57	
1999/00	19	46.2%	59	3.5%
2000/01	18	-5.3%	66	11.9%
2001/02	30	66.7%	92	39.4%
2002/03	31	3.3%	88	-4.3%
2003/04	30	-3.2%	75	-14.8%
2004/05	37	23.3%	87	16.0%
2005/06	22	-40.5%	84	-3.4%
2006/07	31	40.9%	88	4.8%
2007/08	29	-6.5%	98	11.4%
2008/09	41	41.4%	102	4.1%
Change 99-09		215.4%		78.9%

Source data NZ Police Ann Rept 09