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# Crime rate falls but phone scams rise

TELEPHONE scams barely registered on the crime radar in 2006, but last year, they claimed some 378 victims. However, this represented a slight blip compared with the overall crime rate in Singapore, which saw cases fall from 33,263 in 2006 to 32,545 last year – a 2.2 per cent decline. Overall crime rate also dropped from 742 to 695 per 100,000 population, the third-lowest in a decade, police said during its annual crime conference yesterday.

The phone scams, which accounted for a total of \$4.6 million in losses, were carried out through different modus operandi. The lucky draw/lottery scam involved conmen persuading victims to make advance payments to claim a prize. Last year, 325 people fell prey to this scam and lost more than \$4 million.

Conmen also tricked victims into believing that their family members had been kidnapped, and demanded a ransom. Such cases robbed four victims of more than \$80,000 in total. A case in point occurred in August: a couple transferred all \$52,000 of their life savings to callers who claimed they had kidnapped the couple's 30-year-old son, who, as it turned out, was safe at work.

The third scam involved conmen who pretended to be court or police representatives and accused victims of committing criminal acts such as money laundering. Victims were then asked to transfer a sum of money via remittance houses to close investigations into their "offences". A total of 49 cases involving losses amounting to more than \$500,000 were reported.