



General Stealing in Western Australia

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Stealing is a high-incidence crime. Each year, it accounts for more than 30% of all crimes reported to WA Police and is singularly the largest category of reported offence (Ferrante, Loh, Maller, Valuri & Fernandez, 2005). Despite this, theft receives little public, policy or media attention. Perceived as less serious crimes, stealing and theft offences are often overlooked by policy makers and tend to be overshadowed by strategies designed to control and reduce more serious crimes such as violence, burglary, and motor vehicle theft.

The reported stealing offences described in this bulletin pertain to 'general', non-retail theft. The data are not presented as an accurate reflection of the 'true' extent of such theft in the community. Rather, they are a snapshot of the amount of general theft that comes to the attention of the police. Research has shown that crimes are more likely to be reported if they are: (a) more serious offences, (b) the product of policing activity and/or insurance claim obligations, (c) reported by victims who have high expectations of the police, and/or (d) reported by victims who have experienced previous satisfaction with police responses to their reports.

Overview of Reported Stealing Offences

Between July 2004 and June 2005 almost 75,000 stealing offences were reported to and recorded by WA Police.¹ Seventy per cent of these involved personal victims (46% female and 50% male). Less than 1% of reported victims were Indigenous.² It is significant that there were a large number of victims with missing Indigenous status data (95%). This appears to be the product of increased non-recording of information by the police and coincides with the switch to the new IMS system to record crime data at WA Police. Three-quarters of all reported stealing offences occurred in the Perth metropolitan area.

Most personal victims of reported stealing offences were adults. The average age of victims of general theft was 37.7 years (median = 36.0 years). Overall, 46% of personal victims of general theft were aged between 20 and 39 years. (This finding is typical for victimisation, with the 2002 National Crime and Safety Survey demonstrating that victims aged between 20 and 44 years experienced 61% of assault victimisation, ABS, 2003.) Victimisation levels for males and females was relatively even across age groups with victimisation generally rising over the teenage years, peaking in the mid-twenties, and then declining gradually with age.

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Where are these general stealing offences occurring?

As displayed in Table 1, just over one third of reported stealing offences occurred in and around dwellings (35%). This includes stealing from backyards, carports and outside sheds. Stealing from open area sites such as car parks and non-residential places such as offices and schools comprised 24% and 15% respectively.

Place Types	Reported Offences	
	n	%
Dwelling		
House	22,396	30.4%
Flat/Unit	1,750	2.4%
Hotel/Motel	775	1.1%
Other	940	1.3%
Non-Residential		
School	1,969	2.7%
Sports/Rec-Centre	1,059	1.4%
Hotel/Tavern	957	1.3%
Office	1,017	1.4%
Other	6,147	8.4%
Open Space		
Car Park	6,061	8.2%
Street/Footpath	4,83	6.6%
Building Site	2,240	3.0%
Other	4,426	6.0%
Retail		
Pharmacy	82	0.1%
Service Station	5,856	8.0%
Shop	9,141	12.4%
Shopping Centre	3,905	5.3%
TOTAL	73,616	100.0%

Table 1. Place of reported stealing offences

What is stolen in general theft?

Roughly one quarter of the quantity of goods reported as stolen were taken around the house (i.e., front and back

yards, sheds and carports which belong/are attached to a residence), while a further quarter were taken from open space locations (e.g., streets and car parks). As indicated by Table 2 the most

Category of Goods	Dwelling		Non-Residential		Open Space	
	Qty	%Qty	Qty	%Qty	Qty	%Qty
Cash	36,633	18.0%	30,578	18.5%	43,120	20.3%
Fuel/Oil	1,361	0.7%	54,904	33.1%	27,010	12.7%
Cards	36,974	18.2%	6,941	4.2%	8,975	4.2%
Personal	6,607	3.2%	5,343	3.2%	9,289	4.4%
Food/Drink/Cigs	3,951	1.9%	1,576	1.0%	2,043	1.0%
Household	43,341	21.3%	6,470	3.9%	32,088	15.1%
Jewellery/Precious	3,651	1.8%	1,472	0.9%	2,054	1.0%
Office/Computer	8,340	4.1%	7,996	4.8%	8,213	3.9%
Clothing/Footwear	5,196	2.6%	1,203	0.7%	4,405	2.1%
Medical/Health	7,630	3.8%	1,126	0.7%	4,235	2.0%
Phone/Communication	2,990	1.5%	2,944	1.8%	3,620	1.7%
Games	329	0.2%	2,334	1.4%	212	0.1%
Weapon	1,044	0.5%	1,060	0.6%	680	0.3%
Vehicle Parts/Accessories	6,609	3.2%	1,652	1.0%	5,553	2.6%
Agriculture	175	0.1%	110	0.1%	16,218	7.6%
Machinery/Equipment	8,337	4.1%	17,520	10.6%	3,776	1.8%
Outdoor Furniture, Tools	15,584	7.7%	1,755	1.1%	3,939	1.9%
Sports Equipment	4,073	2.0%	12,681	7.7%	1,754	0.8%
Bicycle	4,109	2.0%	1,042	0.6%	743	0.3%
Photography/Camera	1,589	0.8%	770	0.5%	1,392	0.7%
Building Construction Material	2,658	1.3%	4,808	2.9%	22,822	10.7%
Art/Antiques	55	0.0%	43	0.0%	24	0.0%
Miscellaneous	217	0.1%	134	0.1%	582	0.3%
Pets/Livestock	746	0.4%	457	0.3%	9,298	4.4%
Illicit Drugs	21	0.0%	38	0.0%	5	0.0%
Police Items	229	0.1%	486	0.3%	104	0.0%
Musical	168	0.1%	107	0.1%	68	0.0%
Aircraft/Marine	750	0.4%	121	0.1%	608	0.3%
TOTAL	203,367	100.0%	165,671	100.0%	212,830	100.0%

Table 2. Types of goods reported stolen, by quantity and location

common goods (by quantity) taken from around the home were cash,³ credit cards, and household equipment (accounting for over 57% of all items stolen). The greatest quantity goods reported as stolen from non-residential locations were fuel/oil (33%), cash (18%), and machinery/equipment (11%). Fuel/oil was mostly stolen from farms and workshops, while cash (20%) was the most frequently stolen item from open-space locations such as streets and car-parks. It is notable that building construction equipment comprised 11% of items reported as stolen from open space locations.

Table 3 shows the respective value of goods stolen in non-retail theft. These figures demonstrate varying trends across the different locations. For example, from homes, the most commonly stolen items were household items, jewellery, and vehicle parts (combined accounted for over 36% of the value of goods stolen from dwellings). Cash (19%) and electronic items (i.e., games, computers and computer-related equipment, 26%) were the most valuable goods stolen from non-residential locations. From open space locations, cash (17%) and vehicle parts (12%) were the most valuable goods stolen.

Who is Caught for General Stealing Offences?

In approximately 13.5% of stealing offences (10,070 offences), the police were able to identify and 'process' an offender for the crime⁴.

In total, 9,696 offenders were 'processed' by police for these offences. Generally, areas with increased surveillance and security systems (such as retail premises) have much greater numbers of offender

apprehensions for stealing when compared to those areas without these defences (i.e., houses and building sites). Stealing offences occurring on building sites and in homes had the lowest rate of

Category of Goods	Dwelling		Non-Residential		Open Space	
	Value	%Value	Value	%Value	Value	%Value
Agriculture	\$22,965	0.2%	\$57,302	0.5%	\$358,073	2.5%
Aircraft/Marine	\$596,094	4.0%	\$115,938	1.1%	\$730,253	5.0%
Art/Antiques	\$20,150	0.1%	\$14,500	0.1%	\$6,793	0.0%
Bicycle	\$1,310,222	8.7%	\$335,571	3.1%	\$231,360	1.6%
Building Construction Material	\$220,620	1.5%	\$236,804	2.2%	\$911,695	6.3%
Cards	\$28,752	0.2%	\$36,841	0.3%	\$81,214	0.6%
Cash	\$1,162,386	7.7%	\$2,064,357	19.1%	\$2,458,740	16.9%
Clothing/Footwear	\$305,638	2.0%	\$74,322	0.7%	\$283,245	1.9%
Food/Drink/Cigs	\$31,520	0.2%	\$45,511	0.4%	\$17,738	0.1%
Fuel/Oil	\$13,221	0.1%	\$90,317	0.8%	\$107,474	0.7%
Games	\$43,930	0.3%	\$1,512,063	14.0%	\$9,450	0.1%
Household	\$2,235,104	14.8%	\$897,728	8.3%	\$1,465,864	10.1%
Illicit Drugs	\$15,790	0.1%	\$6,285	0.1%	\$143	0.0%
Jewellery/Precious	\$1,654,359	11.0%	\$151,353	1.4%	\$317,372	2.2%
Machinery/Equipment	\$1,040,178	6.9%	\$915,966	8.5%	\$1,407,156	9.7%
Medical/Health	\$65,118	0.4%	\$62,198	0.6%	\$37,873	0.3%
Miscellaneous	\$11,623	0.1%	\$29,630	0.3%	\$62,202	0.4%
Musical	\$87,250	0.6%	\$48,848	0.5%	\$40,178	0.3%
Office/Computer	\$1,464,475	9.7%	\$1,323,421	12.3%	\$1,073,730	7.4%
Outdoor Furniture, Tools	\$841,559	5.6%	\$267,934	2.5%	\$338,325	2.3%
Personal	\$317,295	2.1%	\$173,968	1.6%	\$415,275	2.9%
Pets/Livestock	\$79,326	0.5%	\$25,161	0.2%	\$491,922	3.4%
Phone/Communication	\$727,643	4.8%	\$829,596	7.7%	\$930,223	6.4%
Photography/Camera	\$595,858	4.0%	\$500,710	4.6%	\$691,540	4.8%
Police Items	\$31,185	0.2%	\$46,126	0.4%	\$30,313	0.2%
Sports Equipment	\$582,842	3.9%	\$212,506	2.0%	\$257,840	1.8%
Vehicle Parts/Accessories	\$1,511,452	10.0%	\$693,815	6.4%	\$1,770,051	12.2%
Weapon	\$43,141	0.3%	\$15,408	0.1%	\$13,052	0.1%
TOTAL	\$15,059,694	100.0%	\$10,784,179	100.0%	\$14,539,094	100.0%

Table 2. Types of goods reported stolen, by value and location

apprehension (2.3% and 5.3%, respectively), compared with shops, shopping centres, pharmacies and banks (with apprehensions between 25% and 46% of the time). Theft from schools, which accounted for almost 2,000 reported stealing offences in the period resulted in an offender being apprehended or 'processed' 12% of the time. Furthermore, apprehensions were only recorded for 9% of street-based thefts, 8% of stealing from sporting/recreational facilities, 6% of stealing from car-parks, and 6% of theft from offices.

There were over 46,000 stolen goods associated with these 'processed' offences – representing just 6% of the total quantity of goods stolen and 6.3% of the total value of stolen goods. Just over two-thirds of offences which resulted in an offender being processed occurred in the Perth metropolitan area.

Implications for Crime Prevention

Cash features as an item frequently stolen from homes, offices, and from cars in streets and car-parks. This suggests that members of the public may not be taking sufficient precautions to secure bags, purses, and wallets. There may therefore be benefit in education campaigns aimed at the broader community highlighting the risks of personal theft.

Another important finding to emerge from the study is that a sizeable proportion of stealing offences occur in

places other than retail premises. Over one-third of stealing offences occur in and around the home, signaling a clear need to secure valuable items in the home as well as in yards, garages and sheds. A considerable proportion of stealing offences also occur in open space locations such as in streets and car-parks. Raising awareness of these risks through public education campaigns would be worthwhile, as would strategies aimed at increasing the level of guardianship or surveillance of property at these locations.

The study also found that certain goods, such as computers or computer-related equipment, seem especially vulnerable to theft. Perhaps surprisingly, the data suggested that as many computers or computer-related components are stolen from open space locations (e.g., from vehicles in car-parks) as are stolen from homes or offices. Given this, it would be worthwhile designing and mounting specific policing and crime-reduction strategies targeting computer-related theft.

The study further identified a number of locations which appeared to be vulnerable to theft, but which apprehension of offenders was infrequent. Building sites, sports/recreation centres, and schools were identified as non-retail locations with relatively high levels of theft but with few offenders apprehended or processed for stealing offences. These locations present as suitable opportunities for targeted crime reduction and prevention operations.

References

- Ferrante, A., & Clare, J. (2006). Stealing in Western Australia: A Statistical Analysis of Stealing Offences Reported to Police: Research Report. Crime Research Centre, University of Western Australia.
- Ferrante, A., Loh, N., Maller, M., Valuri, G. & Fernandez, J. (2005). *Crime and Justice Statistics for Western Australia: 2004*. Crime Research Centre, University of Western Australia.

¹ Stealing offences **not** included in the study were those relating to the theft or unlawful use of motor vehicles (although theft from motor vehicles and the theft of vehicle parts and accessories were included). Also excluded were stealing offences committed as part of either a burglary or robbery and stealing offences that involve the use of deception (i.e., fraud offences). This definition of stealing offences was developed in collaboration with the OCP.

The number of reported offences for a period (e.g., Year) comprises all offences reported during that period and may include offences committed during earlier periods. Therefore the reporting of historical offences will inflate the number of reported offences for a period. Offence classifications may also alter between periods due to changes in legislation or administrative recording practices.

² Aboriginality/Ethnicity is derived from the Western Australia Police Service Identity Code field for Ethnic Appearance. The field is completed on the basis of the attending police officer's subjective assessment of the person's appearance, and is recorded for operational purposes only. Care should be exercised in the interpretation of these statistics, as a subjective assessment means it is possible that a person attributed to a particular group does not belong to that group.

³ The WA Police advised that there may be some inconsistency in the manner in which 'quantities' of cash are recorded by police in the IMS system. For example, in some instances, the stealing of, say, \$200 has been recorded as 'quantity = 200 × amount = \$1', while in other instances, the data has been entered as 'quantity = 1 × amount = \$200'. However, in all instances, the total *value* of the cash stolen is the same (e.g., \$200). Some caution should therefore be exercised in the interpretation of data relating to *quantities* of cash stolen.

⁴ Processed persons data refers to persons who have either been arrested, summoned, formally cautioned or referred to a Juvenile Justice Team program. It does not represent total clearances as clearance figures include offenders subject to statute bar, diplomatic immunity and other related processes.

This bulletin highlights aspects of the findings from research conducted by the Crime Research Centre at The University of Western Australia and funded by the WA Office of Crime Prevention (OCP). This research examined stealing, burglary, and stolen goods markets in WA and was designed to assist in the development of appropriate policy and policing responses and to complement the joint OCP/WA Police initiatives, the State Burglary Reduction Taskforce and the development of a State Stolen Goods and Stealing Strategy. Data for the project was supplied by WA Police, having been extracted from the Incident Management System (IMS). The data presented here relates to the 12-month period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005.

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