



# Theft of Jewellery in Western Australia

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*This bulletin examines jewellery theft in Western Australia from two main sources: (a) analysis of stealing offences recorded by police (as discussed fully in Ferrante & Clare, 2006b),<sup>1</sup> and (b) discussions with convicted burglars in Western Australia (as presented in Ferrante & Clare, 2006a). Jewellery has been selected for special examination here because it was identified as a highly desirable item for theft across these two separate research exercises. Generally, previous studies of theft and stolen goods (e.g., Clarke, 1999) have shown that property items, such as jewellery, are highly CRAVED (concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable, and disposable).*

## Stolen Jewellery According to Police Records

Stealing is the largest category of crime reported to police (Ferrante, Loh, Maller, Valuri & Fernandez, 2005). In the 12-month period from July 2004 to June 2005, almost 75,000 stealing offences were reported to and recorded by WA Police. Of the more than 780,000 items that were reported stolen during this period to a value of over \$46 million, jewellery comprised approximately 2% of the quantity and 6% (\$2.7 million) of the value.<sup>2</sup>

## Variations in Jewellery Theft Across Locations

From the findings reported by Ferrante and Clare (2006b) jewellery was in the top two most valuable goods reported stolen from dwellings – accounting for 11% of the total value of reported goods. However, as Figure 1 indicates, there was variation between the *quantity* and *value* of jewellery reported stolen across locations, with jewellery stolen from dwellings comprising 60% of the total value of all stolen jewellery, yet these items accounted for only 25% of the total amount of stolen jewellery. Conversely, jewellery stolen from retail outlets accounted for almost half of total amount of jewellery stolen but comprised only 20% of the total value of stolen jewellery. This demonstrates that jewellery taken from dwellings tends to be of high value but taken in small quantities, while jewellery stolen from retail outlets tends to be of lesser value but taken in greater quantities. This relationship was also identified for cash and office/computing equipment.

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**Who Is Caught Stealing Jewellery?**

Overall, an arrest was made for nearly 11% of the total *quantity* of jewellery items reported stolen in the IMS database. The types of goods that offenders apprehended for stealing varied somewhat with demographic characteristics.<sup>3</sup> Table 1, which lists the top ten categories of stolen goods broken down by the sex of the offender, shows that female offenders were processed for jewellery theft more often than their male counterparts.

When simultaneously considering the age and indigenous status of apprehended offenders,<sup>4</sup> the greatest incidence of jewellery theft was committed by non-indigenous juveniles (N = 797) and non-indigenous adults (N = 545). Significantly less jewellery theft was recorded against indigenous juveniles (N = 140) whilst there were only 5 reported instances of jewellery theft recorded against indigenous adults. However, due to the frequent non-recording of indigenous status (78% missing classifications) in the IMS database, conclusive findings about stealing of jewellery by Indigenous offenders cannot be made.

**Residential Burglars and Jewellery**

**How Popular is Jewellery to Residential Burglars?**

Recent research conducted by Ferrante and Clare (2006a) presented the findings of interviews of 235 convicted burglars completing custodial sentences in Perth metropolitan prisons. Amongst other things, the research found that jewellery was the most popular item stolen and traded by convicted burglars, accounting for over 17% all items stolen and traded by this group. Indeed, jewellery was more than twice as likely to be stolen and traded after a burglary as items such as televisions (10%), cameras (9%), laptop computers (8%) and CD/DVD players (8%).

Just as with the police recorded jewellery theft data, younger offenders were more likely to steal jewellery. Interestingly, indigenous offenders were more likely to report stealing jewellery

during their most recent burglary, which further exposes the limitations of police recording for indigenous status of apprehended persons in the data set discussed previously. Jewellery was also more likely to have been stolen by high-frequency and high-drug-use offenders (as defined within the research).

**What Are Burglars Doing With Jewellery?**

Jewellery was the most common item traded with drug dealers by convicted burglars, accounting for more than one in five of the items traded. (Drug dealers were the most frequently used and fastest accessed avenue of disposal for all stolen items – on average used within 5.5 hours of the burglary. They also found that high frequency offenders were most likely to trade jewellery with second-hand dealers and pawn shops. Young offenders were less likely to trade with such outlets, but when they did so they were more likely to trade items such as jewellery, laptop computers and cameras.

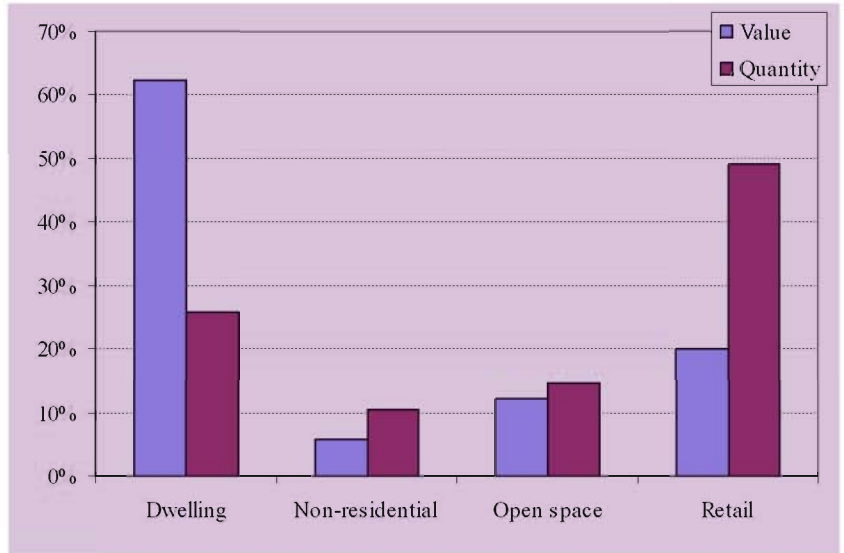


Figure 1. Places where jewellery is stolen (based on quantity and value of goods)

Category of goods	Male			
	Qty	% Qty	Value	% Value
Vehicle parts/access	712	3.4%	\$415,026	22.3%
Household	2,823	13.4%	\$271,015	14.6%
Cash	4,626	21.9%	\$197,976	10.7%
Machinery/Equipment	948	4.5%	\$195,859	10.5%
Office/Computer	1,915	9.1%	\$145,269	7.8%
Phone/Communication	353	1.7%	\$92,168	5.0%
Bicycle	294	1.4%	\$88,213	4.7%
Jewellery/Precious	488	2.3%	\$83,805	4.5%
Outdoor furniture, tools	274	1.3%	\$53,451	2.9%
Photography/Camera	96	0.5%	\$49,330	2.7%
All other categories	8,610	40.7%	\$265,841	14.3%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>21,139</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>\$1,857,953</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Category of goods	Female			
	Qty	% Qty	Value	% Value
Cash	3,389	23.1%	\$157,027	30.2%
Clothing/Footwear	1,973	13.5%	\$62,718	12.1%
Personal	2,553	17.4%	\$58,441	11.2%
Office/Computer	779	5.3%	\$52,445	10.1%
Household	1,629	11.1%	\$46,604	9.0%
Jewellery/Precious	755	5.2%	\$43,784	8.4%
Phone/Communication	127	0.9%	\$28,327	5.5%
Food/Drink/Cigs	1,994	13.6%	\$19,638	3.8%
Photography/Camera	44	0.3%	\$10,756	2.1%
Art/Antiques	23	0.2%	\$9,066	1.7%
All other categories	1,378	9.4%	\$30,796	5.9%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>14,644</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>\$519,602</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 1. Top ten categories of stolen goods, by sex of processed offender

## Implications for Crime Prevention

As jewellery was found to be the most frequently stolen/traded item by residential burglars, there may be some merit in considering specific strategies to make these items harder to steal and/or trade. Possible options include:

- Promoting and improving the identification of jewellery through the expanded use of microdotting (or other technologies, as and when they become available). The use of affordable, shop-front services offering these services could be one way of achieving these ends.

- Technology-permitting, undertake research to track the disposal patterns for monitored pieces of jewellery. This would provide valuable information about the fencing of jewellery, which is neither well understood nor well documented, and would help answer questions such as: How much jewellery is melted down and/or re-crafted? How much jewellery ends up in second-hand shops? How quickly does it get there? How far away (from 'home') does stolen jewellery travel before it emerges for re-sale?
- Attempt to reduce the *demand* for stolen jewellery through a highly publicized 'Make Sure It's Safe To Buy' campaign targeted at those most likely to buy second-hand jewellery.

- Eliminating all cash-based purchases made by pawn shops and second-hand dealers, thereby increasing identification requirements and delaying the financial transaction in exchange for jewellery.

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<sup>1</sup> 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. Accordingly, time series may be broken.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Processed persons data refers to persons who have either been arrested, summonsed, 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

*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. Aspects of the 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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