



Journeys To And From Burglary in Western Australia

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Journeys to and from burglary in Western Australia (WA) have been examined recently by two different studies. First, an interview-style study was conducted by Ferrante and Clare (2006) which broadly explored local burglary. This research involved voluntary interviews with incarcerated offenders in Perth metropolitan prisons and resulted in 235 completed records (see Table 1 for the demographic composition of this sample). All offenders interviewed had recorded at least one conviction for a burglary offence in the last five years. Second, an analysis of official records (WA Police Offence Information System, OIS, for 1999)¹ was undertaken by Fernandez, Clare, and Morgan (2006) that focused on suburban travel patterns to commit burglary in WA.

This bulletin summarises aspects of the findings from these two reports, focusing on (a) how offenders report they travel to and from burglary, and (b) exploring the 'local' nature of this crime as demonstrated by official data. Implications for crime reduction resulting from some integration of these findings are also discussed.

Travelling To and From the Most Recent Burglary – Interview Findings

The interview based research (Ferrante & Clare, 2006) discovered that the two main avenues offenders use to get to properties when committing burglaries are walking and travelling by car (44% and 46% of all interview cases, respectively). When offenders used a car it was stolen 32% of the time. Interestingly, 16% (38 cases) of all interviewed offenders reported that they *did not* leave the burglary in the same way that they got there. Of these, 5% of the total sample reported being apprehended at the scene, while 11% left using a different mode of transport. In 6% of these cases the offender reported exiting the scene of the burglary with the aid of a stolen vehicle (car, motor bike, or truck). Thus, although the majority of offenders (83%) did use the same mode of transport to get to and from their most recent burglary, in more than 1 in 20 burglaries a vehicle was stolen from the scene of the crime which facilitated the offender's get-away.

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When examining different styles of journey as a function of sampled offender characteristics it was found that cars were the predominant means of transport to burglary locations for adult offenders, for non-Indigenous offenders, and for those with high-drug use. In contrast, walking was the most common mode of transport for young offenders, Indigenous offenders and those with low drug use.

Ferrante and Clare (2006) also asked offenders what their main reason was for being in the area when they committed their most recent burglary. These results, which are displayed in Table 2, demonstrate that almost half of the offenders (47%) were specifically in the area to commit a burglary. Additional analysis also identified that non-Indigenous offenders were more likely than Indigenous offenders to be in the area for the purposes of completing a burglary (58% vs. 36%, respectively). Furthermore, adult offenders (63%) were slightly more likely than young offenders (49%) to be in an area for the specific purposes of committing a burglary.

A further interesting finding from the interview-based study was that, following the most recent burglary, almost 30% of burglars went home immediately, 24% went to a friend's house, and 16% went to a dealer, fence or pawnbroker. Less than 3% of offenders moved on to commit another break-in, while approximately 5% of the sample was apprehended at the scene.

Demographic characteristic	Sub-category	N	% N
Age at recent offence	Adult offender (21 yrs +)	141	60.0%
	Young offender	94	40.0%
Indigenous status	Indigenous	122	51.9%
	Non-Indigenous	113	48.1%
Offending frequency	High frequency	132	56.2%
	Low frequency	103	43.8%
Illicit drug-use frequency/severity	Frequent &/or severe use	139	59.1%
	No frequent &/or severe drug use	96	40.9%

Table 1. Offender Demographic Profile (N = 235).

Distance to Burglary – Analysis of Official Records

Through analysis of the 1999 OIS data Fernandez et al. (2006) discovered that two-thirds of all burglaries (66%) were committed within 5 km of the offender's residence, half (48%) were committed within 2 km of their residence, a third (35%) within 1 km, and approximately one in seven (14%) within 200 m (see Figure 1 for the frequency of burglaries committed at 1 km intervals). This indicates the local nature of burglary and the likelihood that burglaries are committed within the offender's own residential suburb or an adjacent suburb.²

Overall, when the distribution of distances travelled was examined at 100 m intervals, it was found that there was no 'home buffer' effect³ – meaning that a significant proportion of burglaries were committed by residents of the neighbourhood (see Figure 2). However, there was some evidence for a home-buffer effect for juvenile offenders, who accounted for a smaller proportion of burglaries that occurred within the first

100 m of their home, even though they accounted for larger proportions of burglaries between 200 m to 700 m away from the their home.

Reason in area	N	% N
To commit a burglary	110	46.8%
Near home	23	9.8%
Chance	37	15.7%
Visiting friends	20	8.5%
Leisure/shopping	11	4.7%
Other - specify	34	14.5%
Total	235	100.0%

Table 2. Relative Frequencies of Reasons for Being in the Area when the Most Recent Burglary was Committed.

How the Distance to Burglary Differs by Age, Sex, and Indigenous Status of the Offender

Fernandez et al. (2006) also discovered some differences in travel patterns as a function of age, sex, and Indigenous status of the offender. These included:

- In 31% of cases females offended less than 2 km from their place of residence compared with 50% of male offenders. By extension, female offenders were found to have travelled further on average to commit a burglary than their male counterparts (8.2 km and 5.6 km, respectively).
- Juvenile offenders⁴ travelled an average of 3.9 km to commit burglary, which was much less than the average distance travelled for offenders aged between 18 and 29 years (7.1 km) and for offenders ages 30 years and older (6.5 km). Similarly, juvenile males travelled considerably less (on average) than juvenile females (3.4 km, compared with 8.4 km) and were more likely to have committed a burglary within 2 km of their residence (65%) than were female juvenile offenders (32%). Overall, juvenile offenders were responsible for 35% of recorded burglaries of any distance, whereas they comprised 48% of burglaries within 1 km of their place of residence.
- Although non-Indigenous juveniles committed 70% of their offences within 2 km of their home, compared with 45% of Indigenous juvenile offenders, where the distance was less than 1 km the average distance travelled by non-Indigenous offenders was 821 m, but the average distance travelled by Indigenous offenders

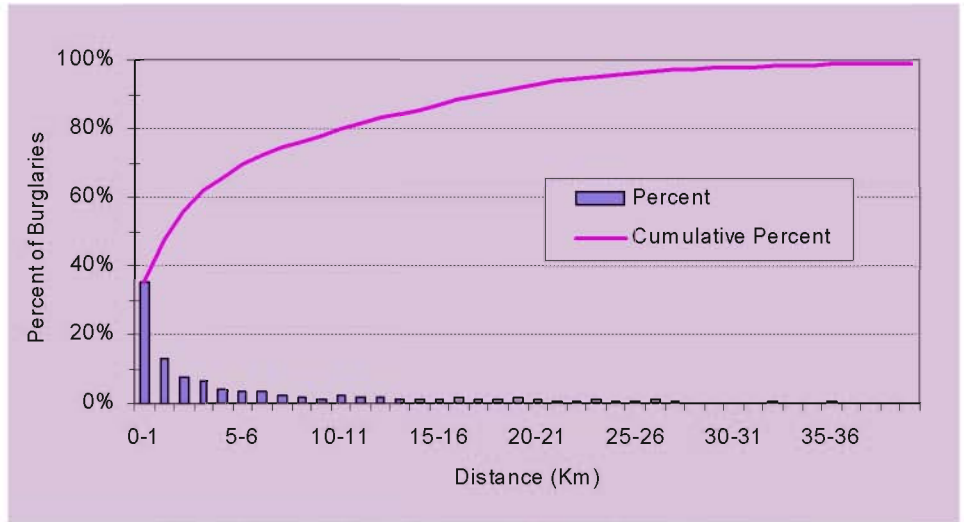


Figure 1. Distribution of Distances Travelled for All Residential Burglaries at 1km Intervals.

was just 151 m. This indicates that where Indigenous offenders are responsible for locally-sourced burglary, they are more likely to reside in the immediate neighbourhood - perhaps a few houses away.

Implications for Crime Prevention

These findings have practical implications for crime prevention in WA; in particular, the potential positive impact of vehicle checks in high-burglary areas. Given that stolen vehicles were only used in about 15% of cases to access a burglary target, and a vehicle was stolen to assist the get-away in a further 6% of cases, it can be concluded that at least 25% of burglars are leaving completed burglaries in a

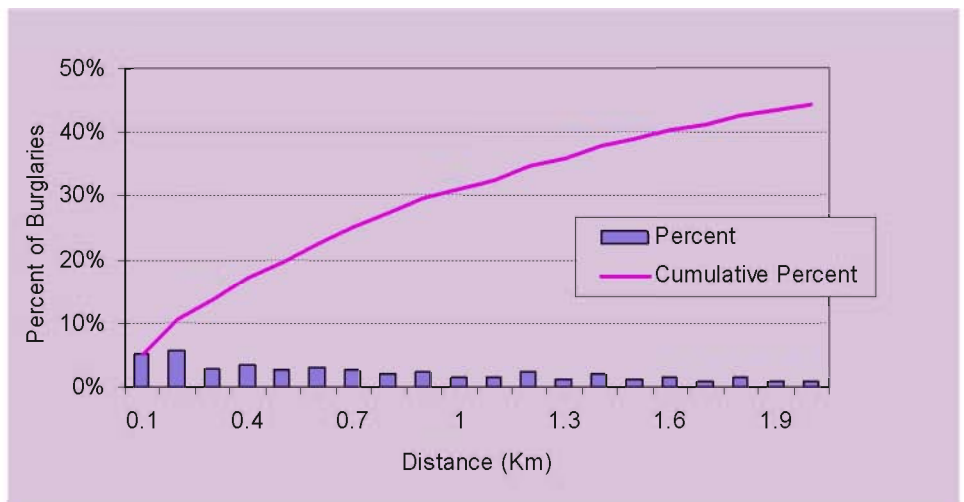


Figure 2. Distribution of Distances Travelled for All Residential Burglaries at 100m Intervals.

vehicle that *is not* stolen. As suggested in a previous bulletin in this series, traffic-based operations (potentially incorporating auto-plate technology) are likely to be very effective when used in conjunction with other burglary-reduction strategies.

Second, given the local nature of many burglaries, and based on the finding that over 50% of the time burglars went directly to their own home or to the house of a friend or relative immediately after offending, an effective strategy could be to look for known burglars within a 2 km radius of the offence, with the search starting close to the victim's residence and working outwards from that point.

References

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¹ This year was the most recent year in which offender and offence address information was supplied by WA Police to the Crime Research Centre.

² Care should be taken when interpreting these figures because the vast suburban sprawl of the Perth metropolitan area ensures that this average distance will be inflated compared with the median distance travelled which is about two kilometres.

³ The assumption underlying the existence of a 'home buffer' is that a smaller proportion of burglaries might be committed very close to the offender's residence because burglars might think there is an increased chance of being detected or recognised by people in the neighbourhood when committing offences close to home (see Brantingham & Brantingham, 1981, for further discussion of this issue).

⁴ Juveniles were classified as under 18 years of age by Fernandez et al. (2006), as opposed to the under-21 years classification chosen by Ferrante and Clare (2006).

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 OCPWA Police initiatives, the State Burglary Reduction Taskforce and the development of a State Stolen Goods and Stealing Strategy.

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