



Household Burglary Trends in Western Australia

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This bulletin uses two principal sources of crime data to examine break and enter dwelling trends in Western Australia since 1993. Its main purpose is to present Western Australian trends in an Australian and international context, and the time period was chosen to maximise opportunities for comparison. The bulletin flags some of the factors associated with both burglary risks and trends. Further research will examine the 'drivers' of burglary trends in detail.

The main findings are as follows:

- *Western Australian burglary rates rose by a quarter (24%) between 1993 and 1995 and then declined by between 44% and 47% between 1995 and 2005.*
- *By 2005 burglary rates were one third lower than they were in 1993.*
- *Survey and recorded crime data paint a relatively consistent picture of trends, but survey data indicate significant declines in burglary from 1998 onwards, while recorded crime data points to a delayed but more rapid decline after 2002.*
- *Other states also experienced burglary reductions between 1993 and 2005.*
- *Burglary declined faster in metropolitan Perth than in non-metropolitan areas.*
- *Declines in Australian break-in rates have generally lagged behind those in the United States and the United Kingdom.*
- *Monthly data over 2005 and 2006 indicate that burglary counts may now have stabilised.*

Background

Burglary is an offence that can seriously violate the victim's sense of emotional and physical security (Maguire, 1980). Some stolen items are irreplaceable but, purely in dollar terms, the average costs of a household burglary incident were estimated in 2003 to be \$2,000, including \$1,100 in victim losses (Mayhew, 2003). Older sources of burglary data suggest that Australian rates of household burglary rose by 150% between 1973/74 and 1991/92 (J. Walker, 1994). While the exact details of the increase are clouded by a lack of consistent national crime data, it is undeniable that burglary rates in Western Australia and in the nation rose significantly between the nineteen sixties and the early nineteen nineties. Australian increases in burglary rates mirrored similar experiences in many industrialised

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countries (Mukherjee and Dagger, 1990), although countries are far from uniform in (a) the extent of their burglary increase, (b) its commencement and (c) its peak.

This bulletin focuses on burglary trends between 1993 and 2005 because both survey and recorded crime data were available for comparison. The year 1993 marked not only the fielding of an important national crime survey, but also the commencement of a new national data collection on recorded crime. The project involved the application of national counting rules and offence classifications, however, continuing development is being undertaken by ABS in order to enhance consistency in data collection methodology¹ (ABS, 2005b). Where appropriate, the bulletin also draws on longer term comparisons.

Trends In Burglary

Trends in burglary indicated by victim surveys

In the 12 months prior to April 2005, an estimated 57,200 households in Western Australia were victims of completed or attempted household break-ins. Furthermore, burglary prevalence is only a partial indicator of the breadth of household crime in WA since (a) most victimised households include more than one individual and (b) some households suffer repeated victimisation. In 2005, victims of burglary and attempted burglary reported an average of 1.5 incidents per household. This section examines how burglary victimisation prevalence rates have varied over time. It compares WA and national rates, and because NSW surveys have been conducted annually

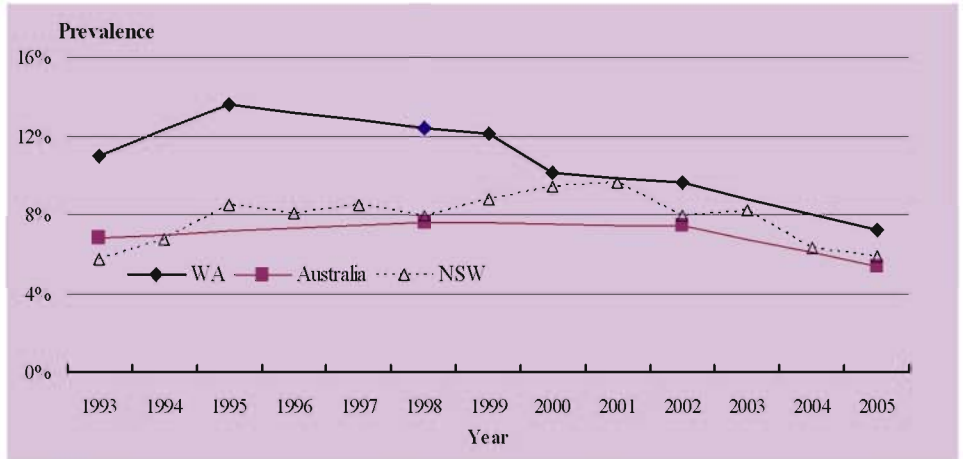


Figure 1. WA, NSW and Australian household crime victimisation prevalence rates for break-in/attempted break-in from 1993 to 2005.

since 1990, the bulletin also uses them as an additional benchmark for comparison. Importantly, it discovers differing trends for metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas² and examines household risk factors for burglary.

State and national trends

Figure 1. displays the combined prevalence rates for break-ins and attempted break-ins over the last thirteen years for WA, NSW and Australia. For

WA the chart points to different periods of change. From 1993 to 1995 burglary prevalence rose from 11.0% to 13.6% but the surveys indicate a sustained decline after 1995. From 1995 to 2005 the prevalence of burglary victimisation in WA almost halved (47% reduction), down from 13.7% of households to 7.2%. Separate analysis of completed and attempted break-ins reveals that, from 1995 to 2005, break-in victimization prevalence rates in WA decreased from 8.9% to 5.0% and

Data Sources and Terminology

Recorded crime and survey data – how they collect and define burglary

This bulletin makes use of two main sources of data – crime and safety surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), and crime recorded by police and supplied to ABS for the publication *Recorded Crime Victims – Australia*. Overall, this bulletin uses the generic term *burglary*. However, ABS surveys use the term *break and enter* (and attempts), while national police statistics use the term *unlawful entry with intent* (including attempts). There are differences in definition between surveys and police statistics.

Crime and safety surveys approach a population sample – individuals selected as representatives of a larger target population – and ask questions about crimes experienced over the past 12 months. Crime surveys have the advantage that they approach the public directly and gain information about burglaries that may never have been reported to police. ABS surveys collect information on burglary by asking the simple question 'In the past 12 months did anyone break into your home?' They also ask a separate question about *attempted* burglary. They offer a relatively reliable way of making comparisons between different jurisdictions, where laws and police recording procedures may differ, however they are subject to error, because they collect information from a small fraction of the population and may not include some segments of the population that are most vulnerable to crime.

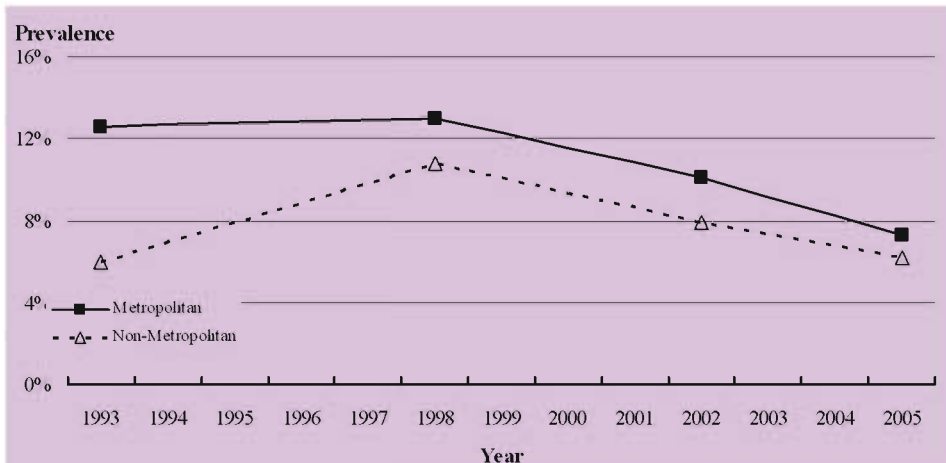


Figure 2. Victimization prevalence rates for household crime in metropolitan and non-metropolitan WA from 1993 to 2005.

Figure 2. As can be seen, there was a large increase in burglary victimisation in non-metropolitan WA between 1993 and 1998 (from 6.0% to 10.8%), while metropolitan rates remained relatively stable over the same time period. From 1998 onwards, however, there has been a steady decline in victimisation in both areas. Furthermore, while victimisation rates have always been greater in the metropolitan area, the difference in rates between metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions decreased. The convergence between burglary rates in the capital city and other areas in the State is also evident in New South Wales surveys. Survey data from NSW indicate fluctuating relativities between 1993 and 2005, but there is evidence of a significant convergence in rates between 2001 and 2004. After 2004 there has been little difference between metropolitan and non-metropolitan burglary rates. Convergence between metropolitan and

attempted break-in victimisation prevalence rates decreased from 7.1% to 3.0%⁴.

Figure 1 shows that national rates showed more modest variation than WA between 1993 and 2005. National rates rose from 6.8% in 1993 to 7.6% in 1998 and changed little between 1998 and 2002 (7.4%). They then declined to 5.4% in 2005. Burglary victimisation rates for NSW were available for every year during this period of interest. NSW rates rose between 1993 (5.7%) and 1995 (8.5%), remained relatively stable up to 1998 (7.9%), rose again between 1998 and 2001 (to 9.6%) and then declined substantially to 2005 (to 5.4%). WA, NSW and national figures all indicate substantial reductions in burglary between 2002 and 2005.

Two other features of the chart are noteworthy. First, for every year in which a comparable survey was conducted, WA experienced higher rates of burglary than NSW and the national average. Second, there was a significant convergence in burglary rates over the period 1993 to 2005. At the beginning of the period the range in rates was 5.3%

but by the end it had narrowed to 1.8%, indicating a closure in the gap between WA and other states.

Perth and the balance of Western Australia

To further explore the WA state trend, the relative rates of household crime victimisation in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas were also examined. These data are displayed in

Data Sources and Terminology cont.

Police-recorded crime statistics in *Recorded Crime Victims – Australia* use the terminology *unlawful entry with intent* (UEWI) to describe an offence where unlawful entry has been gained to a building for the purpose of committing an offence⁵. Attempted offences are also included within the UEWI category. A more detailed description of the nature of this offence is given in the glossary to *Recorded Crime Victims – Australia* (e.g. ABS, 2006b). UEWI statistics include offences committed in residential locations and in other buildings. However, residential UEWI can be separated from non-residential UEWI⁶. UEWI does not correspond exactly with the *break and enter* category defined in surveys, however this bulletin makes the assumption that *trends* in one offence should track the other very closely. A more detailed comparison of surveys with recorded crime statistics is provided in other publications (F. Morgan and Weatherburn, 2006).

Incidence and prevalence

Surveys provide their most reliable information on the number of *victims* who have experienced a burglary or attempted burglary in the past 12 months – a *crime prevalence* estimate. Recorded crime statistics provide information about the number of *incidents* of burglary in a given period – a *crime incidence* figure. Incidence, as defined here, is always higher than prevalence because some victims experience more than one burglary in a year.

non-metropolitan trends in WA also confirmed by police statistics published by the Crime Research Centre. These cover the years 1996 to 2005 and they show that metropolitan household burglary rates decreased faster (52%) than non-metropolitan rates (28%) over this period. Evidence from other countries also indicates that urban and regional rates of burglary have tended to converge (See, for example, Weisheit and Donnermeyer, 1984 for evidence of convergence in the USA). In terms of city size, Canadian recorded crime statistics show that smaller metropolitan areas had higher residential burglary rates in 2002 than larger metropolitan areas, and that Canada's largest city, Toronto, recorded residential burglary rates less than one third of those recorded in the much smaller cities of Regina and Saskatoon (Fedorowycz, 2005).

Patterns of victimisation and change

One advantage of victim surveys is that they support comparisons between sub-groups of the population. As such, it is interesting to consider how victimisation rates for different household types have varied over time. The Western Australian prevalence of burglary (actual and attempted break-ins) in different household types across four surveys is displayed in Figure 3. First, burglary victimisation decreased generally across all household types over this period of time. Second, this decrease in burglary prevalence rates was greatest for households with children (both couples and single parents). Between 1993 and 2005 burglary victimisation rates of couples with children declined by 44%, and for single parent families it declined

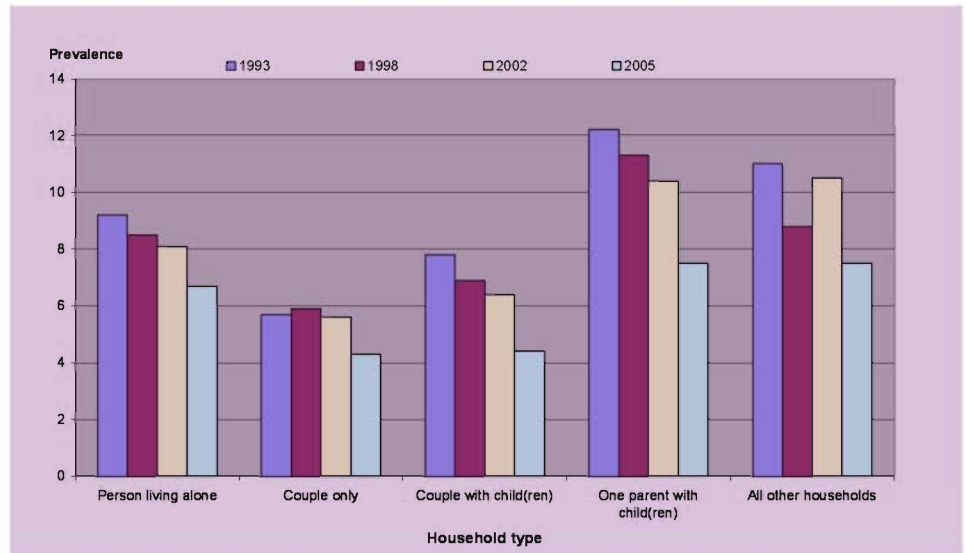


Figure 3. Variation in Western Australian burglary victimisation rates by household type between 1993 and 2005.

by 39%. Across all household types the corresponding decline was 35%. This led to the position in 2005 whereby couple households with children were not distinguishable in risk (prevalence 4.4%) from 'couple only' households (4.3%). Furthermore, one parent households (7.5%) were identical in prevalence to 'all other' households, after being comfortably above them in 1993.

Surveys have also revealed rates of burglary are higher for:

- Households with younger household heads.
- Renters rather than those who are buying or who own dwellings.
- More recent residents, compared with longer-term residents.

In a comprehensive multivariate analysis of burglary risk factors using the 1998 Crime and Safety Survey (ABS, 1999a), household level and area-based predictors of burglary were examined together. These showed that significant burglary predictors included⁷:

- Age of household head (-)
- Single adult households (with or without children) (+)
- Dwelling next to a laneway or bicycle path (+)
- Large amount of vehicle traffic (+)
- Local concentration (more than 10%) of unemployed persons (+)
- Local Government Area concentration (more than 9%) of males aged 15-24 (+)
- Town having a population of less than 8,000 (-)

This bulletin focuses on the years 1993 to 2005. However, tentative conclusions may be drawn about longer-term trends in WA based on data from the first national survey in 1975 (ABS, 1979), the second national survey in 1983 (ABS, 1986) and a WA state survey in 2004 (ABS, 2005a). These surveys asked respondents to answer a single question about break-ins and attempted break-ins, rather than the two separate questions asked in other surveys from 1993 onwards. The 1985 and 2004 surveys are

arguably most compatible with each other, because they included break-ins of garages and sheds, whereas the 1975 survey specifically excluded these break-ins from its scope. Table 1 indicates the burglary prevalence figures from these surveys.

The table suggests that burglary prevalence in 2004 was lower than in 1983, but higher than in 1975, although the removal of break-ins to sheds and garages may have brought the 2004 figures even closer to those of 1975.

Trends in burglary indicated by police recorded crime

Survey data have the advantage that they enforce a common methodology between states, but they are not conducted every year and are subject to sampling and non-sampling errors. It is therefore of interest to compare these results with police-recorded burglary data collected every year. The most recent national recorded crime report displayed a 9.6% rate decrease for UEWI nationally and a 9.0% decrease in WA. Furthermore, the national victimisation rate for residential UEWI of 917 per 100,000 people was the lowest since this national collection process commenced (Calculations based on data in ABS, 2006b).

Consistent with the victimisation trends discussed earlier, residential UEWI victimisation rates have been steadily declining over recent years. After 1995, WA experienced a 44.3% reduction in these rates without experiencing any major annual rate increases. After 1998, national rates also declined steadily by a

Year	1975	1983	2004
Prevalence percentage	4.2	5.7	4.9

Table 1: Break-in and attempted break-in prevalence in Western Australia, 1975, 1983, 2004

magnitude of 41.9%. Despite continued reduction, WA still had burglary rates above the national rate. Crime survey data for 2005 indicate that rates for WA were 33.3% higher, whereas recorded crime data indicate rates for WA were 46.4% higher. A major part of the explanation for survey and recorded crime differences is connected with victim reporting to police. The 2005 Crime and Safety survey indicated that 80% of Western Australian victims of completed break-ins reported the incident to police, whereas the comparable figure across Australia was only 74%.

Comparisons between police and survey trends

Survey and police statistics on burglary trends reveal broad consistency, but there are also some trend variations that are worthy of note. In terms of consistency it is clear that:

- Over the whole period 1993-2005 survey and police recorded burglary rates indicate very similar changes in household burglary in Western Australia. Survey prevalence indicates a decline of 35% whereas police statistics indicate a decline of 31%.
- For the period 1993 to 1995 surveys and police statistics indicate an identical rise of 24%.
- Both data sources indicate comparably modest decreases between 1995 and 1998 (surveys, 8% and police statistics 4%).

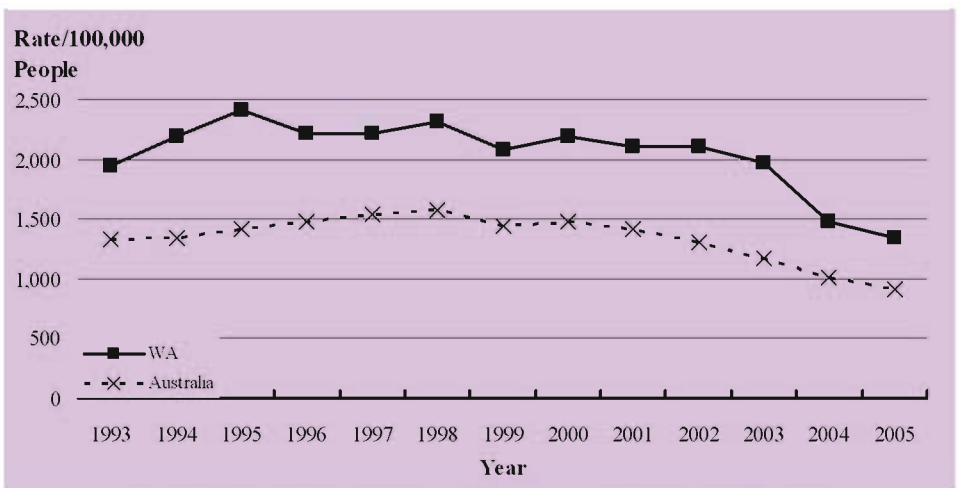


Figure 4. Residential UEWI household crime victimisation rates per 100,000 people: 1994 to 2005.

On the other hand the data sources indicate a different timing of burglary reduction. For example:

- Between 1998 and 2002 surveys indicate a much more substantial decline in burglary (23%) than do police statistics (9%).
- Between 2002 and 2005 police statistics indicate a faster decline in burglary (36%), than surveys (25%). Nevertheless, both data sources support the conclusion that there was a large decline in burglary over this period.

These different data sources paint a fairly similar picture of burglary trends over the period 1993 to 2005. The main differences between them concern the timing of the burglary decline. Surveys indicate that substantial decline occurred between 1998 and 2002 as well as between 2002 and 2005⁸. Despite this ambiguity about the shape of the burglary curve, the two data sources reinforce the conclusion that burglary rates declined by about one third between 1993 and 2005.

International survey comparisons

Further evidence on Australian burglary rates is available from the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS). This indicated that the Australian prevalence of completed burglary reduced from 4% to 3% between 1999 and 2004 (as reported by Johnson, 2005). The ICVS applies a common survey methodology across nations. It is therefore a very useful data source even though some researchers argue that it has not achieved full international comparability (Travis, Brown, Egger,

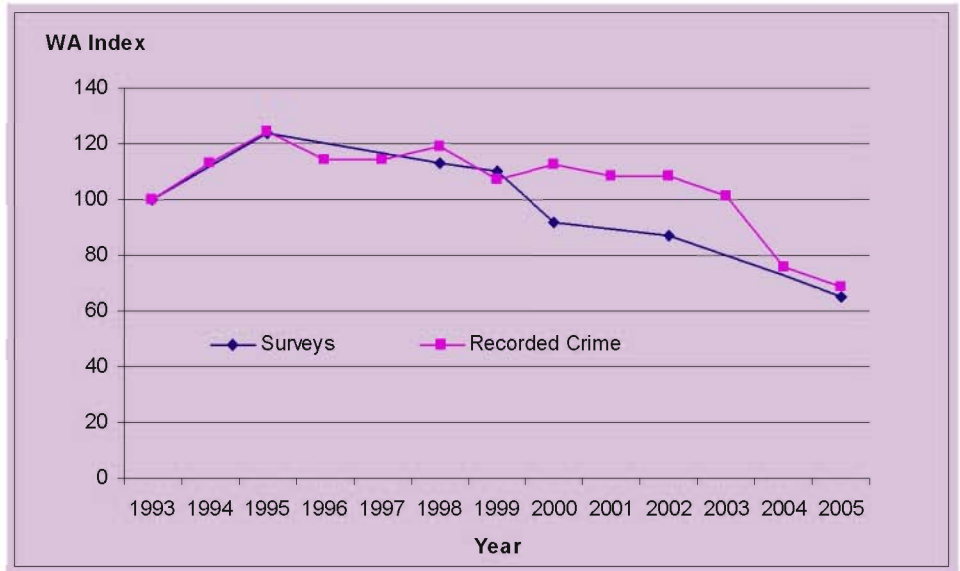


Figure 5. Indexed police and survey trends in household burglary rates, Western Australia: 1993 to 2005.

Data Sources and Terminology cont.

Data coverage, compatibility, and the selection of a time period for trend analysis

ABS conducted six national crime and safety surveys (NCSS) between 1975 and 2005. Four of these have used a compatible methodology for the measurement of burglary and were fielded in the years 1993, 1998, 2002 and 2005 (ABS, 1994; 1999a; 2003; 2006a). Two older surveys are used in this bulletin only as broad indicators of long term trends (ABS, 1979; 1986). In addition to these national victimisation surveys, the ABS has conducted a number of broadly compatible surveys in specific states. These surveys have taken place under various names, including *Crime and Safety Surveys*, a *Western Australian Statistical Indicators Survey*, and a *Home safety and security survey*⁹ (ABS, 1996; 2000a; 2001; 2005a). Surveys in most states have been conducted intermittently between national surveys, however annual crime surveys have been conducted in New South Wales since 1990 (See for example ABS, 2004).

Ideally, recorded crime figures should not be used in isolation from other crime measurements such as surveys, but surveys themselves also generate sampling and non-sampling errors and stand in need of validation. The period 1993 to 2005 is therefore particularly suitable for the analysis of crime rates because it allows different crime measurement methods to be triangulated. The period includes four national surveys as well as annual national publications of recorded crime statistics.

For a number of reasons police recorded burglary statistics display a lower incidence of crime than victim surveys. First, not all offences are reported to police. In particular there are different reporting rates for burglary and attempted burglary, with 80% of completed break-ins reported in WA in 2005, compared to 27% of attempted break-ins. Second, police and victim classification of offences may differ, particularly in the case of attempted break-ins.

Hogg, O'Toole, and Stubbs, 1995).

It is clear from the ICVS that Australia has high burglary rates when compared with other industrialised countries. According to the year 2000 ICVS, Australia had the highest rates of completed and attempted burglary among 17 selected industrialised nations around the world. Australia's combined rate of completed and attempted burglary was estimated to be 6.6% in the year 1999, compared with the United Kingdom (5.2%), Canada (4.4%), Denmark (4.2%), Belgium (4.1%) and the USA (3.8%). The nations with lowest rates were Japan (1.8%) and Finland (1.2%).

A more recent ICVS was conducted in 2004 but as yet there has been no single publication presenting the Australian results alongside those of other nations. However if the results of research by Johnson (2005) and van Dijk and colleagues (2005) are combined, it appears that the gap between Australian burglary rates and those of other nations was smaller in 2005 than in 2000. Johnson reports rates of completed burglary in Australia in 2004 at 3% while van Dijk and colleagues report the UK rates at 3.3%¹⁰.

Australia has not been the only country to experience reductions in burglary victimisation in the past decade, so it is useful to compare trends in Australia with those in other comparable countries. Here the large scale national victimisation surveys in the United States and the United Kingdom are useful resources for analysis¹¹. In the United Kingdom, evidence from the British Crime Survey shows that burglary rates peaked in 1993 and by 2005/6 had declined by

62% (A. Walker, Kershaw, and Nicholas, 2006). The *National Crime Victimization Survey* in the United States reveals that residential burglary rates fell by 49% between 1993 and 2005¹² (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006, Table 2.02). Finally, Canadian surveys indicate that household burglary rates fell by 24% between 1993 and 2004 (Statistics Canada, 2005). These trends may be compared with the decline of 35% indicated by surveys in Western Australia over the same period, and also the decline of 47% from the peak burglary year in 1995. The WA reduction is a little smaller than those experienced in either the USA or the UK, but larger than the Canadian decline.

Note also that trends in these countries provide a warning to Australian states. The long decline in the USA appears to have ended, with burglary rates stabilising between 2001 and 2005. Similarly, burglary reduction in the UK slowed considerably between 2004/5 and 2005/6 after more than 10 years of significant decline.

Survey data on dwelling security

A further advantage of surveys is that they are able to combine data on victimisation with other factors, including security measures adopted by householders. National surveys in 1993 (ABS, 1994) and 1998 (ABS, 1999b), and state surveys for NSW in 1999 (ABS, 2000b) and 2004 for WA (ABS, 2005a) provide a picture of changes in security levels over the past 11 years in WA. In

1993, 12.4% of WA residents reported some form of electronic security in their houses. The corresponding figure for NSW was 15.2%. However, by 1998 the prevalence of burglar alarms alone had risen to 14.9% (WA) and 16.3% (NSW). Finally, when surveyed in 2004, 27.4% of households in WA had electronic security alarms, while in 1999 the figure for NSW was 19.8%. Alarms constituted only a subsection of responses in 1993, but in both states the survey evidence indicated alarms outnumbered all electronic security systems in place in 1993. In the case of WA, the number of houses with alarms in 2004 more than doubled those previously reporting any form of electronic security in 1993. The ICVS provides further evidence of increased security, indicating that as many as 26% of dwellings across Australia had a burglar alarm installed in 2004 (Johnson, 2005). Though not detailed here, the results for burglar alarms reflect an increase in the implementation of security measures in general, though the comparisons between surveys are somewhat difficult because of variations of groupings of security measures in successive surveys. WA householders implemented a range of security measures, including security screens, locks and shutters on doors and windows.

There is evidence that basic devices, such as deadlocks and window locks, as well as sophisticated devices, such as burglar alarms, can be effective in (a) reducing burglary and also (b) converting completed burglaries into attempted burglaries (Budd, 2001). The trend for increased security is driven by both victims of burglary and by other householders. Figure 5 indicates that

28% of WA households who reported break-in or attempted break-in victimisation in 2004 changed their security features after the incident, including more than one in three victims of completed burglary (35%) and one in six victims (17%) of attempted burglary. Research interviews with active residential burglars in America by Wright and Decker suggested that "From a prevention standpoint... a good time to implement additional security measures (e.g., the installation of burglar alarms, storm windows, or security bars) is immediately following a break-in" (Wright and Decker, 1994, p210). Nevertheless, all devices, whether simple or elaborate need to be activated to achieve maximum benefit. In 2004 the point of entry was unlocked in 38% of successful burglaries whereas this was true of only 7% of attempted burglaries (ABS, 2005a).

Discussion

Since peaking in 1995, WA burglary rates have shown substantial reductions, whether measured by police recorded crime data or by victimisation surveys. Burglary is not alone in displaying this decline and Western Australia has led the nation in motor vehicle theft reduction, which has shown the most striking decline of all offences. However, the decrease has not applied to offences against the person such as assault (ABS, 2006a; 2006b), so it is important to consider the range of factors that may have generated the burglary decline. While it is beyond the scope of this bulletin to provide a detailed analysis of this issue, the following sections discuss some of these possibilities.

Understanding the factors that influenced the burglary decline is

important if we wish to ensure that it continues. Nevertheless, the search for explanation is not necessarily a simple task. For example, there is ongoing debate about the causes of the well-documented homicide decline in New York and other cities of the USA, despite volumes of academic articles and books addressing this

issue. In the case of motor vehicle theft it is clear that the widespread adoption of immobilisers has heavily influenced the decrease in motor vehicle theft, and that WA has been a lead state in encouraging and enforcing the adoption of immobilisers. In the case of burglary it

appears that the adoption of increased security measures may have also influenced the decline in burglary rates, but this hypothesis needs further testing in WA and other states. It is consistent with the greater burglary decline experienced in metropolitan Perth compared with the remainder of the state because security levels are generally lower in non-metropolitan areas and may not have kept pace with metropolitan Perth. However, it is a matter for exploration as to whether suburbs implementing higher security have been those experiencing the greatest reductions in burglary. It is also important to note the findings of the ICVS that the most common crime prevention measure adopted by Australians was 'friendly arrangements with neighbours' (Johnson, 2005, p48). Improved security and technology need not be implemented in fortress-like social isolation, and is most likely to be effective when combined with support by trusted others in the neighbourhood.

A criminal justice system framework

Some researchers point to the potential of the criminal justice system to reduce crime, drawing on classical concepts of deterrence, rehabilitation and incapacitation. For example Farrington and colleagues (2004) examine eight industrialised nations with respect to a variety of justice system dimensions, including the probability of conviction, the use of custodial sentences, average length of prison terms and other factors. The use of cross-national data provides considerable difficulties for comparative analysis but is somewhat easier for

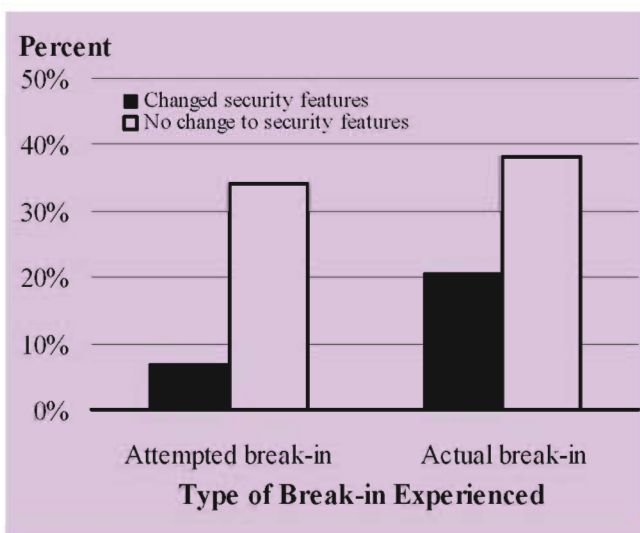


Figure 5. Householder security responses to break-in experiences in the 12 months prior to survey in 2004.

Australian states.

In WA there have been a number of changes in legislation with respect to sentencing in general and for burglary in particular. These all warrant careful examination. One initiative – the introduction of ‘Three Strikes’ legislation in November 1996 – was examined by Morgan (N. Morgan, 2000), who found that burglary rates had begun to decline before the legislation took effect.

Other researchers point to the limited influence of the criminal justice system (See e.g., Felson, 1998). For example, national data indicate that fewer than ten percent of burglaries result in the processing of an offender¹³ (ABS, 2006b), and there are inherent difficulties in substantially raising burglary clear-up rates in large cities. Because of this, more comprehensive approaches to crime prevention and to the social influences on crime have been advocated.

Government Initiatives with respect to crime prevention

Consistent with these broader approaches, a number of WA initiatives have been taken with respect to crime prevention in general and burglary in particular. Relatively recent examples of these include the WA “Burglary Reduction Taskforce”, established in 2002 to implement an across-Government effort to tackle burglary. A number of joint initiatives between the WA Office of Crime Prevention (OCP) and the WA Police designed to tackle burglary within WA. One of these, “Operation Burglary Countdown”, which commenced late in

2003, has involved a “multi-pronged attack on burglary – a focussed police effort using the latest DNA technology and techniques, a public awareness campaign and a package of crime prevention initiatives” (OCP 2005). This intervention has aimed to (a) provide citizens with property security appraisals, (b) place an increased emphasis on neighbourhood watch schemes in preventing and solving crime, and (c) increase public and school awareness about the WA Police current focus on burglary prevention. This holistic approach to burglary reduction is consistent with similar initiatives in the UK, using a “market reduction approach” (Sutton, Johnston, and Lockwood, 1998) to reduce stolen goods markets, which by extension decreases burglary rates.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of these forms of burglary intervention it is critical that the pre- and post-intervention data from the exact geographical areas within which the intervention occurs are compared with the equivalent information from other areas (Bowers, Johnson, and Hirschfield, 2003). Given the relative recency of this intervention, comprehensive evaluation of the impact of this holistic approach on reducing burglary is yet to be undertaken. However, initial trends suggest this scheme has had very positive preventative effects in some high-victimisation Perth suburbs (Cummings, 2005). Operation Burglary Countdown has now been expanded to incorporate other Perth suburbs and also selected regional towns.

A framework for examining the push and pull of crime

In searching for a useful theoretical framework to explain changes in crime, it is useful to draw on the work of van Dijk (1998) who examines at cross-national level the factors that influence both offender motivation and crime opportunities. Applying routine activities theory to national crime levels led van Dijk to propose that national crime rates result from the interaction of motivated offenders, relatively weak mechanisms for social control, and the presence of suitable targets of crime (Cohen and Felson, 1979; van Dijk, 1998). Van Dijk linked the *demand* for crime with offender motivation and with factors such as unemployment, poverty, inequality and other measures of deprivation. *Supply* factors for crime include measures of opportunity such as vehicle ownership, frequency of outdoor visits, proportion of single person households, and labour force participation. The approach of van Dijk and others reveals that crime is not linked in a simple way to economic development and affluence. Increasing affluence and economic opportunity may reduce the motivation to offend within a population. However, it may also create more opportunities for crime, particularly property crime, by ensuring the ready availability of small and valuable consumer objects, such as mobile phones, audio equipment, laptop computers, and so on. It may also reduce the security of dwellings by allowing householders to be away from the home more often, through work, recreation or entertainment.

Van Dijk's framework focuses our attention to the areas of both motivation and opportunity. Changes in unemployment rates and deprivation should affect offender motivation, whereas changes in household composition, employment, and outdoor culture should affect burglary opportunity. However, this vulnerability could be potentially offset by increasing use of technology to increase the security of dwellings. Increases in security measures in Western Europe have been suggested as a major factor generating reduced burglary rates (Lamon 2002, as quoted in Aebi, 2004).

Additional influences on burglary rates

Other social and demographic factors, including shifting population demographics no doubt influence rates of burglary. For example, research findings suggest a large proportion of burglary (estimates ranging from approximately 30 to 50 per cent) is committed by males under the age of 18 years (Nelson, Collins, and Gant, 2002; Wright and Decker, 1994) and that that residential burglary is often committed by inexperienced juvenile offenders (Cromwell, Olson, and Avary, 1991). Demographic changes in the proportion of young males in the population will no doubt influence burglary levels in WA. This type of pattern has been observed in other parts of the world, for example, "... relatively more Americans were born in the baby boom years, 1947-1960, than in 1978-1987. Add 16 years, and you have a particular predictor of American burglary rates. Burglary was higher in 1975, when 19 percent of Americans were ages 15-24.

But the burglary rate was lower in the year 2002, when only 14 per cent belonged to that same age group" (Felson, 2006, p9).

As discussed by Moffatt et al. (2005) a number of other factors have possibly contributed to the reduction in household crime observed in recent years. These include general economic improvement, reduction in drug availability, and an increased involvement by offenders in pharmacotherapy programs. These authors also found a significant relationship between an aggregated measure of imprisonment (which involved the number of offenders imprisoned for burglary each month combined with the sentence length each offender received) and a reduction in burglary. Note, however, that Western Australia has high rates of imprisonment compared with the Australian average, including for burglary offences.

Conclusions

Determining the exact interaction between these factors and the trends observed for burglary for WA is beyond the scope of this bulletin, but will be examined in future research. However, from the trend data presented in this bulletin, it does appear safe to draw a number of conclusions. First, burglary victimisation has declined in WA. Second, there have been decreases in burglary both nationally and internationally. Third, although the levels for burglary in WA are dropping, the state still suffers burglary rates exceeding the national average, whether measured by surveys or by recorded crime statistics. Fourth, there has been a convergence in rates of

burglary in Perth and the remainder of the state, indicating that the needs of many regional areas for burglary reduction initiatives are no less than those of metropolitan Perth.

While burglary rates have declined since 1993, Australian and international burglary declines show signs of slowing down and monthly burglary statistics published by WA Police in 2005 and 2006 indicate that WA burglary counts are no longer declining. There is therefore no sense in which the prevention efforts of police, crime prevention agencies and citizens can be relaxed.

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Endnotes

¹The offences of assault and sexual assault, rather than other offences, have been identified as lacking full comparability, but there may also be some differences in the recording of UEWI offences. Current inconsistencies stem from cross-jurisdictional variations in legislation between states and also differences in police recording procedures.

²These differences are not revealed by national recorded crime statistics because current recorded crime statistics are disaggregated only at the level of state.

³Missing data points indicate years where no data are available. The line joining these points is an interpolated linear estimate of victimisation during the periods with no data.

⁴The ratio between completed and attempted break-ins has been found to be relatively constant over time.

⁵UEWI is defined by the ABS as the unlawful entry of a structure with the intent to commit an offence. UEWI offences include

burglary, break and enter, and some stealing. This definition contrasts with the WA legal definition of burglary, used by police, which is that: "burglary [is] an offence that is committed when a person enters or attempts to enter the place of another person (such as a building, structure, tent or conveyance), without that other person's consent, with intent to commit (or actually committing) an offence in that place such as stealing property."

⁶The residential locations used in this bulletin to calculate household burglary include external locations such as sheds and garages. This definition is broader than most legal definitions of 'home' or 'residential' burglary. However, it does compare closely with the approach now used in ABS crime and safety surveys, so the adoption of the definition maximises the validity of survey comparisons.

⁷The sign within the brackets indicates the direction of the influence, for example older household heads indicate lower burglary prevalence.

⁸Britain and the United States conduct annual crime surveys and a more refined analysis of burglary rates would have been possible if such data were available in Australia.

⁹The *Home Safety and Security Survey* is used in this bulletin mainly for its information on security measures. It is not used for 1993-2005 trend analysis because of differences it has a different question format from most recent surveys. However, it is used to examine

longer term trends because of its broad compatibility with older surveys.

¹⁰Note that Johnson rounded rates to only one significant figure (meaning the Australian rates could have been anywhere between 2.5% and 3.4%, while van Dijk et al. rounded the European figures to two significant figures, therefore it is not possible to say that Australian rates were lower than those of the United Kingdom in 2004 on the basis of these publications.

¹¹These surveys use different methodologies so it is not appropriate to compare their burglary rates with each other or with Australia's survey rates. Nevertheless it is appropriate to examine burglary *trends* within each country and to compare these with Australian trends. The ICVS is less useful for trend analysis because participation rates of nations have been intermittent and because small sample size in most countries makes trend analysis less stable by comparison with the large scale national victimisation surveys.

¹²The US trends must be seen in the context of a sustained and uninterrupted burglary decline since 1981 leading to a 72% decline between 1981 and 2005.

¹³Though these data may underestimate the number of offenders processed in connection with other offences.