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**LATEST REPORT SHOWS IMPACT OF SENTENCING LEGISLATION ON
SENTENCES AND IMPRISONMENT**

The University of Western Australia's Crime Research Centre's latest report *Crime and Justice Statistics for Western Australia: 2005*, describes trends and patterns in crime, police arrests, criminal court activity, imprisonment and juvenile contact with criminal justice.

According to the Centre's Director, Frank Morgan, the report pointed to uneven changes in personal and property crime rates in 2005.

"Rates of recorded assault increased by 8 percent in 2005, but robbery decreased by 12.4 percent", Mr Morgan said.

"Murder rates in 2005 were the lower than in any of the past 21 years, decreasing from 38 in 2004 to 19 in 2005, but large yearly fluctuations in low volume offences such as murder do not necessarily indicate a long term trend."

"Property crime rates decreased by 4.1 percent, including burglary (down 15.1 percent), while motor vehicle theft continued its long period of decline since 1995. Other theft decreased in 2005 but fraud, property damage and handling stolen goods increased" he said.

"During 2005, sentencing legislation to abolish prison sentences of six months or less was operational for a full year after coming into effect in May 2004. Prisoner intakes reduced by three percent but prisoner numbers remained stable, reflecting longer effective prison sentences. Fine defaulters comprise the bulk of the sentenced prisoner intake with effective prison terms of six months or less and the percentage of prisoners admitted with such short terms dropped to 29% in 2005 from 33% in 2004. WA ranks second in the country (behind the Northern Territory) in rates of adult imprisonment."

"Community Corrections data in the report indicate the gradual growth of supervision of orders introduced by 2003 legislation which introduced Pre-sentence orders, CEO parole orders and Re-entry release orders"

"In the higher courts in 2005 the number of finalised offence counts decreased by 13 percent, partly because more burglary cases were sentenced in the lower courts. Most charges (69%) led to convictions, a slight decrease on the previous year (76%). The drop in conviction rates affected burglary and deception offences more than others. After conviction, prison was the most common sentencing outcome (61% of all offence counts)."

"Magistrates' court cases resulted in high conviction rates (over 96%) and the major sentencing outcome for those convicted was a fine (72%). The proportion of prison sentences

in lower courts remained unchanged at 6 percent, but in 2005 a greater proportion of offences resulted in sentences greater than six months.”

“Burglary cases decreased by 28 percent in the higher courts, while they increased in lower courts by 27 percent. In 2005, higher court burglaries were more likely to result in imprisonment and to be given longer custodial sentences than in 2004.”

Mr Morgan said: “In 2005, indigenous offenders remain over-represented in arrests (by a factor of 8), in juvenile custody (by a factor of 44) and in prison (by a factor of 31).

The report, Crime and Justice Statistics for Western Australia contains detailed information on these and other crime and justice trends, and can be purchased (\$30) by contacting the Administrative Secretary, Crime Research Centre at UWA, +61 8 6488 2830 or email crime.research@uwa.edu.au

Internet access to the report will be available at: <http://www.crc.law.uwa.edu.au/>

MEDIA REFERENCE:

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