Introduction

This Report contains statistical information on crimes and the criminal justice system in Western Australia in 1996. It is the seventh annual statistical report of the Crime Research Centre and follows Crime and Justice Statistics for Western Australia: 1995, which was published in December 1996 and reported on data collected for the period 1 January to 31 December 1995.

Data Sources

Reported Crime

Statistics on crimes reported to police are derived from the police Offence Information System (OIS). Crime maps are also derived from OIS and page 16 contains important information on the interpretation of those maps. National crime statistics from the ABS were again published for 1996. A summary of results from National Crime Statistics, January to December 1996 (ABS Cat No 4510.0), is presented in section 1.2.

Apprehensions and Juvenile cautions

Data on police apprehensions and juvenile cautions are reported in Chapter 2. These derive from the P18 form (arrests/summonses) and the computerised Juvenile Cautioning System maintained by the WA Police Service.

Adult Courts

The data from the Supreme and District courts are described in Chapter 3 and have been extracted from the computerised records contained in the Higher Court criminal case management systems (SRCASE) of the Ministry of Justice.

Children’s Courts

Children’s Court and related juvenile justice data have been extracted from the Ministry of Justice case management system (LWRCASE). Data regarding referrals to juvenile justice teams were obtained from both the LWRCASE system and the Juvenile Cautioning System used by the WA Police Service.

Correctional Services

The data in Chapter 5 on prisoners and supervised offenders have been extracted from the computerised records of the Offender Management Division of the Ministry of Justice.
Chapter 5 also reports on offenders held in police lock-ups. This information has been extracted from the Lock-up Admission System of the WA Police Service.

**Omissions**

The data coverage excludes the following data which are not yet available to the Centre:
* charges heard and finalised by the Courts of Petty Sessions
* detailed data relating to the juvenile justice teams.

As indicated in earlier Reports, there is a dearth of publicly available information about the activities of the adult lower courts in WA. The situation was improved slightly in 1996 through the publication of three reports by the ABS describing the Courts of Petty Sessions for 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 (ABS Cat No. 4502.5). A summary of statistics from these publications has been included in Chapter 3 of this Report.

The future of lower court statistics beyond 1996 remains unclear, however, negotiations to resolve this issue are continuing.

Access to data from the juvenile justice teams has yet to be negotiated between the Ministry of Justice and the Crime Research Centre. However, some limited data describing those juveniles who have been referred to teams (either by the police or through the Children’s Court) have been compiled and presented in Chapter 4.

**Inclusions**

For the first time, the Report includes comprehensive information about persons detained or serving sentences in police lockups. This includes persons detained for drunkenness under provisions of the *Acts Amendment (Detention of Drunken Persons) Act 1989* which came into force in April 1990, decriminalising the offence of public drunkenness.

The data have been obtained from the police Lock-up Admission System and describe lock-up activity state-wide, from 1994 onwards. A detailed description of 1996 lock-up receptions is included in Chapter 5, while additional tables describing 1994 and 1995 activity are presented in Appendix D.

**Comparability**

Data are presented so that statistical tables are generally comparable from one Report to the next. Data relating to police apprehensions and imprisonment are comparable and form an unbroken series from 1990. From these data series it has been possible to identify changes and discuss trends.

Data relating to crimes reported to police also form a series from 1991. Trends are now discussed, in particular, those relating to homicides reported to police, since this offence classification has remained relatively impervious to changes in classification and recording practices. However, changes to the definitions of some offences (namely, robbery and the offence of ‘break, enter and steal’) have affected the comparability of these offences between 1991 and subsequent years.
National crime statistics, published by the ABS National Crime Statistics Unit (NCSU) since 1993, also provide a uniform national series on reported crime using nationally agreed standards and counting rules.

The statistical series describing juvenile justice activities, that is, the Children’s Court, the Children’s (Suspended Proceeding) Panel and the juvenile cautioning system were disrupted in 1995 as a result of legislative changes. The Young Offenders Act 1994 brought about significant change including the abolition of the Panel, the introduction of juvenile justice teams (and associated referral processes from the Courts and the police), and the recognition of cautioning as a legal diversionary option. Thus, data from the Children’s Court and from the juvenile cautioning system, though still extracted from the same source, may not be entirely comparable with previous years.

Comparability for the Higher Courts was an issue in the past. However, some comparability has been achieved for this data collection since 1993.

The Sentencing Act 1995, which came into force in November 1996, has affected the data series relating to non-custodial orders (community-based corrections). The Act abolished the use of community service orders (CSO), probation and good behaviour bonds and introduced ‘new’ orders such as intensive supervision orders (ISO), community-based orders (CBO) and conditional release orders (CRO) (for more detail, see Chapter 5).

Finally, the series relating to police lock-ups is no longer completely comparable with previous years (although an attempt is made in section 5.3 of the Report). This Report introduces a new and more extensive series for lock-ups based on data from the WA Police Service. A full description of this collection (with a discussion of comparability) is provided in Chapter 5.

**Multiple offending and counting rules**

In any recording system, it is difficult to accurately reflect what occurs in the ‘real’ world, especially as the incidents that make up a crime event may involve a number of offenders, a number of victims, different offences and/or multiple incidents of a single offence type. By distinguishing between individual offenders and the offences recorded, we can partly deal with some of the problems associated with multiple offending.

A complicating factor in police arrest records is that records are provided for each different offence and, in cases where more than one offence of the same type is recorded at the same time, a count of the number of incidents of the same crime is also recorded. Thus in police apprehension records, we record individuals or ‘distinct persons’, the number of different ‘offences’ or charges resulting, and a ‘count’ of the total number of offences (inclusive of multiple incidents of the same offence).

Tables and figures are published both for distinct individuals and by all ‘events’ (that is, all offences, charges, convictions, prison receivals, etc) occurring during the counting period and it is important to understand the differences in what is being measured. Individuals may have more than one arrest, conviction or prison reception during the period, so counting only individuals would substantially under-count the number of offences dealt with by the criminal justice system. Similarly, counting only charges or convictions or prison receptions would not show the number of distinct persons actually involved in crime — in fact, this would over-count the number of offenders. Thus, in order to understand the extent of crime, both ways of measuring are required.
The incidence of crime is best measured by counting the relevant events, such as reported offences, apprehensions, cautions, convictions or prison receptions. The prevalence of crime (the proportion of a population involved) is best measured by counting the number of distinct individuals involved during the counting period.

In tables describing data relating to distinct persons, only the most serious offence (if more than one offence was involved) is included. The protocol for determining which is the most serious offence is detailed in Appendix B. However, it should be noted that for prison data the most serious offence is determined by the longest sentence, and for community-based corrections data by the lowest ANCO classification.

The ANCO system, developed by the ABS, has been adopted for the description of offences.\(^1\) Like many classification systems, ANCO attempts to group similar behaviours together but does not attempt to order these behaviours by their relative seriousness or harm. A full description of ANCO can be found in Appendix A of the Report.

Counting rules and definitions of offences and other factors (for example, definitions of race, marital status) used by each agency (and in subsets of their data) differ, and thus it is extremely important to note which rules or definitions apply. Moreover, some data collections have high levels of missing data and the treatment of these cases also varies. The different ways of handling missing data are explained at the relevant points in the Report.

Finally, as some readers may be unfamiliar with some of the terms and abbreviations used in the Report, a glossary has been provided (Appendix C).

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1. The ANCO system was revised by the ABS in 1997. The revised classification, known as the Australian Standard Offence Classification (ASOC) provides a uniform national statistical framework for classifying criminal offences in each State and Territory in Australia. The ASOC represents a significant advance over its predecessor, taking account of the changes to criminal legislation since 1985 and rectifying a number of shortcomings of the previous coding system. For more information, refer to ABS Cat No. 1234.0.