

Preface

This Statistical Report is published by the Crime Research Centre, University of Western Australia, and draws together available crime and justice statistics for Western Australia for 2002. This is the fifteenth publication in the series and the thirteenth to describe annual (calendar year) activities and current trends.

The Report is made possible only by the cooperation of the Centre's data providers: the WA Police Service (WAPS) and Department of Justice (DoJ). The goodwill and constructive working relationships between the Centre and these organizations have ensured that the statistical series, of which this Report is a part, now extends well beyond a decade.

Within the Centre itself, the Report is the product of teamwork, patience and a year-long commitment to collecting, collating and analysing data. The meticulous tasks of collating statistics, preparing tables and figures, and assembling the details of each chapter were the responsibilities of Mr John Fernandez and Ms Nini Loh. Ms Anna Ferrante, Mr Max Maller and Ms Giulietta Valuri provided the necessary data validation and extraction upon which the components of the chapters are based. They are each to be commended for their hard work and fine skills.

Frank Morgan
Director

Executive Summary

General crime

In comparison to other Australian states and territories, Western Australia (WA) had average or below average recorded crime rates for most offence categories in 2002 (see Chapter 1, Tables II & III). The Northern Territory had the highest homicide, assault and sexual assault rates, New South Wales had the highest rates for robbery and kidnapping/abduction, South Australia had the highest rate for motor vehicle theft, while WA had the highest rate for burglary offences. WA has had the highest rates of recorded burglary offences since the start of the ABS national recorded crime series (1993). Until recent years, WA also had the highest rate of motor vehicle theft; however, since 1996, the WA rate has been declining and is now one of the lowest in the nation.

The rate of recorded crime in Western Australia decreased by 1.6 percent in the 12 months to December 2002, and the total number of recorded offences decreased marginally (by 0.5 percent). The rate of recorded offences against the person decreased from 1,298 to 1,264 offences per 100,000 persons, a decrease of 2.6 percent. Within this category, the robbery rate (armed and unarmed combined) fell from 107 to 101 offences per 100,000 persons; while there were also decreases in the number of sexual assaults and other offences against the person. However, the number of offences of homicide and assault increased in 2002. The property crime rate decreased by 1.7 percent, from 14,519 to 14,269 per 100,000 persons. Within this category, the number of offences of burglary and property damage decreased, but stealing increased. Theft and attempted theft of motor vehicles continued to decrease, and the rate of motor vehicle theft per 100,000 registered motor vehicles was 48 percent lower than what it was in 1995, the peak year for this offence.

For offences against the person, victimisation risk is dependent on Indigenous status, age and sex, but victimisation patterns are far from simple. In 2002, women were more likely to be victims of sexual assault and other offences against the person, while men were more frequently the victims of homicide, assault, and robbery and extortion. For female victims, 71.0 percent were under the age of 35, while for male victims, 66.6 percent were in this age group. Indigenous people accounted for a disproportionate number of victims of violence. Based on crimes reported to the police, the victimisation rate of Indigenous people for violent offences in 2002 was 5,766 per 100,000 persons - more than five times the victimisation rate of non-Indigenous people (1,069 per 100,000 persons). Women accounted for 71.9 percent of all Indigenous victims, compared with 45.0 per cent of all non-Indigenous victims.

The distribution of crime varied across the state. Overall, about three quarters of all reported crime was located in the Perth metropolitan area. However, for different types of crimes, the distribution varied from region to region. Violent offence rates were highest in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Central and South Eastern regions - no doubt related to the high levels of Indigenous victimisation. Perth recorded the highest rate of robbery offences. The Central region had the highest rate of sexual offences and the South Eastern region had the highest rate of property offences (see Chapter 1, Table IX).

Police Apprehensions

Compared to 2001, the total number of apprehensions decreased by 1.1% and the total number of distinct persons arrested decreased by 5.0%. Both the number of adults and the number of juveniles arrested by police decreased during 2002, and they are now at their lowest levels in this reporting series (1990 to 2002). However, while arrest rates have been relatively steady for non-Indigenous adults over the last thirteen years, rates have continually increased for Indigenous adults, particularly females. This large increase in adult female Indigenous arrests (from 1,381 in 1991 to 2,246 in 2002) relates mostly to justice and good order offences and driving-related offences.

The level of over-representation of Indigenous people in police arrest statistics increased in 2002, after having been relatively stable for three years. In 2002, Indigenous people were over ten times more likely to be apprehended by police than non-Indigenous people. In the case of arrests for violent offences, this differential is even more marked: Indigenous people were over twenty three times more likely to be arrested for offences against the person than non-Indigenous people, and Indigenous females were over forty eight times more likely to be arrested for such offences than non-Indigenous females.

Juvenile justice

Compared with 2001 figures, the number of juvenile cautions issued by police decreased by 7.6%, the second successive decrease since 1997. Indigenous participation in the cautioning scheme has increased since 1995 – from 16% to 25% in 2002. Forty six percent of cautions were issued outside the Perth metropolitan area in 2002.

The number of juveniles referred to teams by the police decreased by 8.2% in 2002, and the number of juveniles referred to juvenile justice teams by the Children's Court decreased by 7.8%.

More generally, the number of charges and juveniles dealt with by the Children's Court declined in 2002. Compared with 2001 figures, charges finalised by the Court fell by 7.8%, while the number of juveniles dealt with decreased by 5.2%.

The most frequent offences with which distinct juveniles in the Children's Court were charged in 2002 were burglary/theft offences (35%), followed by driving/motor vehicle offences (24%) and offences against the person (19% - mostly assault and robbery).

The most common sanctions imposed for all charges in the Court were non-custodial sentences; however, a significant proportion (26%) of burglary/theft offences received custodial sentences.

Overall, 9.2% of juveniles who appeared before the Children's Court were placed in detention, and these were responsible for 13.1% of all offences heard by the court.

National data on the number of juveniles held in juvenile detention centres show that the juvenile justice detention rate in WA has declined each year since 1998. Compared to other States and Territories, the WA juvenile detention rate (35.0 per 100,000 juvenile persons) was the fourth highest in the country. The WA Indigenous juvenile detention rate was 410.3 per 100,000 Indigenous juveniles - the highest in the country. This rate was thirty eight times greater than that for non-Indigenous juveniles and 1.6 times the national rate.

Adult Court activity

Following the sharp rises from 1998 to 2000 and a single decrease in 2001, the number of charges finalised by the Higher Courts has increased by 5.7% in 2002. Almost half (47.9%) of all charges dealt with by the Higher Courts involved property offences (mostly burglary and fraud offences), and another one third (32.6%) involved offences against the person (violence) – of which just over half were sexual offences. There was a 64.8% increase in the number of fraud charges dealt with by the Courts in 2002.

Conviction was the most likely outcome for charges heard in the Higher Courts (in 77% of charges, either the plea or the court outcome was 'guilty'). A further ten per cent of charges resulted in acquittal and about eight per cent were withdrawn (*nolle prosequi*).

Conviction rates varied according to offence type. The lowest conviction rates were for homicide, sex offences and assault (between 50% and 60%), while robbery (86%), property offences (83%) and drug offences (80%) had the highest conviction rates. Compared to 2001, conviction rates for all offence types have increased, except for robbery and fraud. After a significant drop in 2001, the conviction rate in 2002 for assault (64%) returned to the levels observed previously.

Following conviction, imprisonment continued to be the most common sentence handed down by the Higher Courts (62% of convicted charges received this penalty). Prison sentences were most likely for violent (against the person) offences – 76% of such offences received a custodial sentence upon conviction. For most types of offences, the use of suspended (prison) sentences has continued to increase since 1996.

The Report also includes statistics about the adult lower courts (Courts of Petty Sessions), which deal with about three quarters of offences brought before Western Australian criminal courts (usually the less serious offences).

Compared with 2001, the number of charges dealt with by the Courts of Petty Sessions in 2002 increased by 1.5%. The most common offences dealt with by the Courts of Petty Sessions were driving offences (36%), good order offences (21%) and burglary/theft offences (19%). In the main, conviction rates were high in the adult lower courts (96% overall; 99% for driving offences and 91% for offences against the person).

Reflecting the less serious nature of offences dealt with by the lower courts, the most common sentences imposed by the court were fines (64%), followed by non-custodial orders (21%) and prison sentences (8%). Compared with other types of offences, burglary/theft offences and violent offences were the most likely to receive prison sentences, while driving offences and drug offences were most likely to receive fines. Burglary/theft offences, violent offences and driving/vehicle offences were also more likely than other types of offences to receive *longer* prison sentences (ie, terms greater than 12 months).

Of all driving offences (the most common offences dealt with by the courts), charges of driving while disqualified (DWD) constituted the largest sub-category (39%). Most DWD offences received fines as penalties (78%), but 7% received prison sentences and, of these, more than half received relatively long sentences of six months or more.

General prison trends

Compared with 2001 figures, prison receptions in 2002 decreased by 6.9%, while the prison census population remained virtually the same as in the previous year. Based on average daily prisoner population, WA continues to rank second in the country (behind the Northern Territory) in rates of adult imprisonment.

Indigenous people accounted for about two fifths (42.0%) of prison receivals but only one third (34.5%) of prisoners on census night - indicating a higher 'throughput' of Indigenous prisoners (for comparatively shorter sentences) than non-Indigenous prisoners.

Almost four fifths of prisoners (79.3%) were unemployed at the time of receipt into prison, and the average age of all prisoners received was 29.8 years.

Burglary/theft (13.9%), against the person (13.8%), motor vehicle/driving offences (13.3%) and good order offences (6.6%) were the most frequent offences committed by offenders received into prison. Almost half of all receptions had no offence information supplied; however, most of these related to remand cases. Indigenous offenders accounted for 65.9% of all prison receptions for damage offences and 63.3% of all receptions for motor vehicle/driving offences.

As in previous years, female Indigenous people featured in the general prison trends for 2002. Although they accounted for a relatively small proportion of sentenced prison receptions (7.7%), their presence in the statistics is noteworthy because a significant percentage (49.6%) of sentenced female Indigenous prisoners were in prison for fine-default.

Lock-up trends

The number of admissions into police lock-ups decreased by 5% in 2002 - the first decrease since 1995 - even though admissions due to police arrests increased. The number of drunken detainees placed in police lock-ups in 2002 continued its decreasing trend since 1996 (from 8,845 to 2,433 admissions). Indigenous persons accounted for 90% of all drunken detainees received.

Community-based orders

Compared with 2001 figures, the total number of community-based orders issued to offenders in 2002 decreased by 10%. Specifically, decreases occurred in work and development orders (29%), intensive supervision orders (10%), parole orders (8%) and home detention (13%). However, community-based orders rose by 5%, and work release orders remained the same.

The profile of offenders serving these orders differed according to the type of order issued. For example, 58% of work and development orders were served by Indigenous people, 52% of intensive supervision orders were served by young offenders aged 25 years or less, while a significant proportion of community-based orders were served by female offenders (30%).