



Retail Theft in Western Australia

Joe Clare and Anna Ferrante

Few studies of retail crime have been conducted in Australia. To some extent this reflects a certain acceptance within the retail industry that stealing is an unavoidable and inevitable part of doing business with the public. According to the most recent Australian survey of small business victimisation, the Small Business Crime Survey conducted in 1999, while 9 out of 10 completed burglaries and robberies were reported to police, only 1 in 17 incidents of employee theft, 1 in 5 incidents of shoplifting and 1 in 4 incidents of cheque/ credit card fraud were reported to police (Taylor, 2002). It was also found that completed crimes were more likely to be reported to police than attempted crimes. These trends were supported by a more recent Queensland study of retail theft (Taylor and Charlton, 2005) that found fewer than 14% of incidents of retail theft were reported to the police.

The reported stealing offences described in this bulletin are not presented as an accurate reflection of the 'true' extent of retail theft in the community. Rather, the data are a snapshot of the amount of retail theft that comes to the attention of the police. Previous research findings indicate that property crimes that become known to the police tend to be: (a) more serious offences, (b) the product of policing activity and/or insurance claim obligations, (c) reported by victims who have high expectations of the police, and/or (d) reported by victims who have experienced previous satisfaction with police responses to their reports.

Overview of Reported Stealing Offences

In the 12-month period from July 2004 to June 2005, almost 19,000 retail-related stealing offences were reported to and recorded by WA Police.¹ Stealing offences overall represent approximately 30% of all crimes reported to police, and retail theft accounted for roughly 26% of all reported stealing. Associated with these retail-based offences were over 198,000 items of stolen property, with a total value of approximately 5.7 million dollars. Three-quarters of all reported business-related stealing offences occurred in the Perth metropolitan area.

Crime Research Centre
35 Stirling Hwy
WA 6009
Tel: 6488 2830
Fax: 6488 1111
www.crc.law.uwa.edu.au

Disclaimer: The findings and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of the government departments who supported the research.

Office of Crime Prevention
Tel: 9222 9733
www.crimeprevention.wa.gov.au



Office of
Crime Prevention

