



# General Stealing in Western Australia

Anna Ferrante and Joe Clare

*Stealing is a high-incidence crime. Each year, it accounts for more than 30% of all crimes reported to WA Police and is singularly the largest category of reported offence (Ferrante, Loh, Maller, Valuri & Fernandez, 2005). Despite this, theft receives little public, policy or media attention. Perceived as less serious crimes, stealing and theft offences are often overlooked by policy makers and tend to be overshadowed by strategies designed to control and reduce more serious crimes such as violence, burglary, and motor vehicle theft.*

*The reported stealing offences described in this bulletin pertain to 'general', non-retail theft. The data are not presented as an accurate reflection of the 'true' extent of such theft in the community. Rather, they are a snapshot of the amount of general theft that comes to the attention of the police. Research has shown that crimes are more likely to be reported if they are: (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

Between July 2004 and June 2005 almost 75,000 stealing offences were reported to and recorded by WA Police.<sup>1</sup> Seventy per cent of these involved personal victims (46% female and 50% male). Less than 1% of reported victims were Indigenous.<sup>2</sup> It is significant that there were a large number of victims with missing Indigenous status data (95%). This appears to be the product of increased non-recording of information by the police and coincides with the switch to the new IMS system to record crime data at WA Police. Three-quarters of all reported stealing offences occurred in the Perth metropolitan area.

Most personal victims of reported stealing offences were adults. The average age of victims of general theft was 37.7 years (median = 36.0 years). Overall, 46% of personal victims of general theft were aged between 20 and 39 years. (This finding is typical for victimisation, with the 2002 National Crime and Safety Survey demonstrating that victims aged between 20 and 44 years experienced 61% of assault victimisation, ABS, 2003.) Victimisation levels for males and females was relatively even across age groups with victimisation generally rising over the teenage years, peaking in the mid-twenties, and then declining gradually with age.

Crime Research Centre  
35 Stirling Hwy  
WA 6009  
Tel: 6488 2830  
Fax: 6488 1111  
[www.crc.law.uwa.edu.au](http://www.crc.law.uwa.edu.au)

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Office of Crime Prevention  
Tel: 9222 9733  
[www.crimeprevention.wa.gov.au](http://www.crimeprevention.wa.gov.au)



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