



Money, Drugs and Burglary in WA: Examining the Currencies of the Local Stolen Goods Market

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In late 2005 a WA-based, interview-style study was conducted to explore local burglary (Ferrante & Clare, 2006). This research involved voluntary interviews with incarcerated offenders in Perth metropolitan prisons and resulted in 235 completed records. All offenders interviewed had recorded at least one conviction for a burglary offence in the last five years. This bulletin summarises aspects of the findings from questions regarding the link between stolen goods and drugs – covering issues such as the frequency of trading for drugs, the types of drugs received, and the relative use of drugs by different offender groups. Some implications for crime reduction resulting from these findings are also discussed. The demographic details of the offenders who participated in this research are displayed in Table 1.¹

Detailed analysis of the offender sample revealed that, overall, highest drug use was associated with non-Indigenous status, high-frequency offending and age, with adults being more likely to report high-usage than juveniles. The link between age, serious drug use and high-frequency offending is not surprising as it has been argued that as some offenders get older and their level of drug use becomes more serious, their addiction becomes a significant driver for committing burglary. This finding supports the theory that heavy involvement in drug use leads to an increase in the rate of offending amongst existing offenders but does not provide support for the hypothesis that all burglaries are motivated by a drug habit, with 41% of our offender sample not frequent or severe drug users.

How Frequent Are Stolen Goods Traded for Drugs?

Table 2 displays the overall frequencies with which stolen goods were traded across the various disposal avenues. As can be seen, across all transactions there was approximately a 50:50 split between money and drugs as the chosen 'currency' for the stolen goods. Unsurprisingly, drug dealers traded drugs the greatest percentage of the time (59%), whereas family, friends, and fences were more likely to 'pay' offenders in cash for their stolen goods. Legitimate businesses were the only disposal avenue that did not trade in drugs. It is important to emphasise here that drug dealers were by far the most popular avenue for disposing of stolen goods, and were involved in over 57% of all transactions discussed by offenders.

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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.

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