CRIME AND JUSTICE STATISTICS FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA 2001

The Crime Research Centre at The University of Western Australia has released its report on Crime and Justice Statistics for Western Australia: 2001. It describes general trends and patterns in crime, police arrests, criminal court activity, imprisonment and juvenile contact with criminal justice.

The Centre found the overall rate of crime reported to police rose by 3.1 per cent during 2001. The rate of violent offences increased by 4.2 per cent. In this category, rises occurred in rates of assault (5.8 per cent), sexual assault (5.1 per cent) and other offences against the person (1.5 per cent), while the robbery rate decreased by 2.4 per cent and homicides fell from 91 to 71.

The rate of reported property crime increased by 3.1 per cent. In this category there were rate increases in other property damage (14.4 per cent) and burglary (0.9 per cent), however, the rate of home burglary fell by 3.9 per cent in 2001 and the rate of motor vehicle theft fell by 5.5 per cent. The rate of motor vehicle theft has declined by 41 per cent since 1995 and is well below the Australian average after Western Australia led the nation for this offence for many years. Compared with other Australian states, WA had average or below average recorded crime rates for all other types of offences in 2001, except for burglary, for which WA continues to have the highest rate in the nation.

Police apprehensions increased by almost 3 per cent in 2001, yet the number of distinct individuals arrested decreased by 2 per cent, indicating a higher frequency of apprehension among a smaller number of individuals. The level of over-representation of Aboriginal people in police arrest statistics decreased slightly but has remained fairly stable since 1998.

Police cautioning of juvenile offenders decreased by 4.5 per cent, which is the first annual decrease since 1997, and police referrals of young offenders to 'teams' decreased by 2 per cent. The number of juveniles who appeared before the Children's Court decreased by 6.4 per cent. Of these offenders, 14 per cent were placed in detention and were responsible for 21 per cent of all offences heard by the court. The WA juvenile detention rate in 2001 was again one of the highest in the nation. WA had the highest rate of detention for Aboriginal juveniles, and this rate was 65 times greater than that for non-Aboriginal juveniles in WA and over twice the national rate.

In the adult criminal courts, there was a 2 per cent increase in the number of charges dealt with in the Courts of Petty Sessions, but a 15 per cent decrease in the Higher Courts.

Following a substantial increase in the number of fraud charges dealt with by the Higher Courts in 2000, there was a 54 per cent decrease in 2001. In the Higher Courts, 73 per cent of charges resulted in conviction. Overall, 63 per cent of convictions resulted in custodial sentences, but this figure rose to 77 per cent for violent offences.

Compared with 2000 figures, prison receptions increased by 2 per cent, but the prison census showed a decrease of almost 8 per cent. Aboriginal people accounted for 43 per cent of prisoners received in 2001 but only 33 per cent of prisoners on census night – indicating a higher turnover of Aboriginal prisoners (for comparatively shorter sentences) than of non-
Aboriginal prisoners. Almost two thirds of all prison receptions for motor vehicle/driving-related offences were of Aboriginal offenders. Of all female Aboriginal prisoners, 29 per cent were in prison for fine-default.

The number of offenders ordered to serve sentences in the community increased substantially in 2001. Work and development orders increased by 29 per cent, intensive supervision orders increased by 25 per cent and community-based orders rose by 21 per cent. However, home detention orders fell by 3 per cent.

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Copies of the report ($30) can be obtained from:
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Electronic copies of the report will be available (in PDF format) at:
http://www.law.ece.uwa.edu.au/crc