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 2001. This is the fifteenth publication in the series and the twelfth 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 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

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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 2001 (see Chapter 1, Tables I & II). 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 recently, 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 rose by 3.1 percent in the 12 months to December 2001, and the total number of recorded offences rose by 4.6 percent. The rate of recorded offences against the person increased from 1,242 to 1,295 offences per 100,000 persons, an increase of 4.2 percent. Within this category, the robbery rate (armed and unarmed combined) fell slightly in 2001, from 109.8 to 107.2 offences per 100,000 persons, as did offences of homicide, from 91 to 71. However, offences of assault, sexual assault and other offences against the person increased. The property crime rate increased by 3.1 percent, from 14,049 to 14,482 per 100,000 persons. Within this category, the number of offences of burglary, stealing, and property damage increased. Break and enter dwellings decreased, but this reduction was outweighed by increases in commercial and other break-ins. Theft and attempted theft of motor vehicles continued to decrease, and the rate of motor vehicle theft per 100,000 registered motor vehicles was almost 41 percent lower than it was in 1995, the peak year for this offence, representing a reduction of over 8,450 thefts and attempted thefts compared with 1995 levels.

For offences against the person, victimisation risk is dependent on Indigenous status, age and sex, but victimisation patterns are far from simple. In 2001, 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, 72.4 percent were under the age of 35, while for male victims, 67.1 percent were in this age group. Aboriginal people accounted for a disproportionate number of victims of violence. Based on crimes reported to the police, the victimisation rate of Aborigines for violent offences in 2001 was 5,517 per 100,000 persons – almost five times the rate of non-Aborigines (1,105 per 100,000 persons). Women accounted for over 71.4 per cent of Aboriginal victims, compared with 45.7 per cent of non-Aboriginal 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 offences were highest in the Kimberley, Pilbara, South Eastern and Central regions – no doubt related to the high levels of Aboriginal victimisation. Perth recorded the highest rate of robbery offences. The Upper Great Southern region had the highest rate of sexual offences and the South Eastern region had the highest rate of property offences (see Chapter 1, Table VIII).
Police Apprehensions

Compared to 2000, the total number of apprehensions increased by 2.9% but the total number of distinct persons arrested decreased by 2.0%. Since 1999, arrest rates of juveniles show a slightly decreasing trend. For adults, arrest rates have been relatively steady for non-Aboriginals but have continually increased for Aboriginals, particularly females. This large increase in adult female Aboriginal arrests (from 1,381 in 1991 to 2,191 in 2001) related mostly to good order offences such as disorderly conduct and resisting arrest, and driving-related offences, such as driver's licence offences.

Although still high, the level of over-representation of Aborigines in police arrest statistics has stabilised since 1998. In 2001, Aboriginal people were almost ten times more likely to be apprehended by police than non-Aboriginal people. In the case of arrests for violent offences, this differential is even more marked. Aboriginal people were almost twenty times more likely to be arrested for offences against the person than non-Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal females were over thirty six times more likely to be arrested for such offences than non-Aboriginal females.

Juvenile justice

Compared with 2000 figures, the number of juvenile cautions issued by police decreased by 4.5%, which is the first annual decrease since 1997. Aboriginal participation in the cautioning scheme has increased since 1995 – from 16% to 22% in 2001. Forty four percent of cautions were issued outside the Perth metropolitan area in 2001.

The number of juveniles referred to teams by the police decreased by 2% in 2001, and the number of juveniles referred to juvenile justice teams by the Children's Court also decreased by 2%.

More generally, the number of charges and juveniles dealt with by the Children's Court declined in 2001. Compared with 2000 figures, charges finalised by the Court fell by 2.7%, while the number of juveniles dealt with decreased by 6.4%.

As in previous years, burglary/theft offences constituted the most common offences dealt with by the Children's Court (40%), followed by good order (18%) and driving/motor vehicle offences (14%). The most common sanctions imposed by the Court were non-custodial sentences, however, a significant proportion (30.6%) of burglary/theft offences received custodial sentences.

Overall, 13.9% of juveniles who appeared before the Children’s Court were placed in detention, and these were responsible for 20.6% of all offences heard by the court.

At a national level, the WA juvenile detention rate (43.5 per 100,000 juvenile persons) was again one of the highest in the country. The WA Aboriginal juvenile detention rate was 588.5 per 100,000 Aboriginal juveniles, which was sixty five times greater than that for non-Aboriginal juveniles and 2.1 times the national rate. Since 1998, the juvenile justice detention rate in WA has declined.
Adult Court activity

After sharp rises from 1998 to 2000, the number of charges finalised by the Higher Courts decreased in 2001. Two fifths (40.5%) of all charges dealt with by the Higher Courts involved property offences (mostly fraud and burglary offences), and another two fifths (42.7%) involved offences against the person (violence) – of which just over half were sexual offences. Following a substantial increase in the number of fraud charges dealt with by the Courts in 2000, there was a 53.7% decrease in 2001.

Conviction was the most likely outcome for charges heard in the Higher Courts (in 73.3% of charges, either the plea or the court outcome was 'guilty'). A further twelve per cent of charges resulted in acquittal and about ten 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 (91%), property offences and drug offences (both about 80%) had the highest conviction rates. Compared to 2000, conviction rates for all these offence types have decreased, except for robbery; most notable among these is that for assault, which for several years remained at about 65%, but in 2001 was only 59%.

Following conviction, imprisonment continued to be the most common sentence handed down by the Higher Courts (63% of convicted charges received this penalty). Prison sentences were most likely for violent (against person) offences – about 77% of such offences received a custodial sentence upon conviction. For some types of offences (assault, robbery, burglary and motor vehicle theft), the use of suspended (prison) sentences has increased 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 2000, the number of charges dealt with by the Courts of Petty Sessions in 2001 increased by 2%. The most common offences dealt with by the Courts of Petty Sessions were driving offences (33%), good order offences (22%) and burglary/theft offences (19%). In the main, conviction rates were high in the adult lower courts (95% overall; 99% for driving offences and 95% for good order offences).

Reflecting the less serious nature of offences dealt with by the lower courts, the most common sentences imposed by the court were fines (65%), followed non-custodial orders (20%) and prison sentences (9%). Compared with other types of offences, burglary/theft offences and violent offences were the most likely to receive prison sentences, while driving offences were most likely to receive fines. Burglary/theft offences, violent offences and other property 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 under suspension (DWUS) constituted the largest sub-category (40%). Most DWUS offences received fines as penalties (78%), but 8% received prison sentences and, of these, more than half received relatively long sentences of six months or more.
**General prison trends**

Compared with 2000 figures, prison receptions in 2001 increased by 2.1%. Prison census populations decreased by 7.7% - the first decrease since the continual increases after 1996, which reflected the growing number of prisoners serving generally longer prison sentences.

Aborigines accounted for two fifths (43%) of prison receivals but only one third (33%) of prisoners on census night – indicating a higher ‘throughput' of Aboriginal prisoners (for comparatively shorter sentences) than non-Aboriginal prisoners.

Driving/motor vehicle of fences accounted for a large proportion of prison receptions (15%) - the majority of these were licence-related offences, primarily driving while under suspension. Violent offences (14%), burglary/theft (13%) and good order offences (8%) were the next largest offence categories; however, almost half of all receptions had no offence information supplied. Almost two thirds (64%) of all prison receptions for motor vehicle/driving offences were of Aboriginal offenders.

As in previous years, female Aborigines featured in the general prison trends for 2001. Although they accounted for a relatively small proportion of total prison receptions (7.2%), their presence in the statistics is noteworthy because a significant percentage (29%) of sentenced female Aboriginal prisoners were in prison for fine-default.

**Lock-up trends**

The number of admissions into police lock-ups increased by 2% in 2001 – due mostly to increases in police arrests. However, there were fewer drunken detainees placed in police lock-ups in 2001 (2,972 detainees) than in 2000 (3,111). Since 1996, the number of drunken detainees in police lock-ups has fallen considerably (down 66%) – from 8,845 to 2,972 admissions. Note, though, that drunken detainees made up 6.2% of all lock-up receptions in 2001 but comprised only 3.3% of all distinct persons received; thus indicating a small but highly repetitive population.

**Community-based orders**

Compared with 2000 figures, the total number of community-based orders issued to offenders in 2001 rose by 20.2%. Specifically, work and development orders (WDOs) increased by 29%, intensive supervision orders (ISOs) increased by 25%, community-based orders (CBOs) rose by 21%, and parole orders rose by 9%. Home detention, however, again declined (by 3%).

The profile of offenders serving these orders differed according to the type of order issued. For example, a large proportion of WDOs were served by Aborigines (70%), ISOs were served mainly by young offenders aged 25 years or less (56%), while a significant proportion of CBOs were served by female offenders (29%).