



Release date: 2 November 1998

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **The stolen goods market in New South Wales**

Stolen goods are being used as barter to obtain illegal drugs from drug dealers according to a new report released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

The Bureau study is the most comprehensive research investigation into the stolen property market ever undertaken in Australia.

It was funded by the NSW Police Service to assist in devising its anti-theft strategy.

The study involved anonymous interviews with 267 imprisoned burglars in NSW prisons and juvenile detention centres.

About 70 per cent of burglars serving sentences for break, enter and steal in NSW prisons or detention centres admitted to swapping stolen goods for illegal drugs, mainly heroin and cannabis.

Other popular methods of disposal revealed in the Bureau report include selling stolen goods to family, friends and acquaintances, legitimate businesses and pawn and second hand shops.

Each of these avenues were used by half or more than half of those surveyed.

Amongst legitimate businesses purchasing stolen goods, the most common avenues of disposal are mixed businesses (eg. the 'corner store'), jewellery stores, wreckers/mechanics, tradesmen and computer stores.

The first two of these outlets (i.e. mixed businesses and jewellery stores) are each used by more than 30 per cent of those who dispose of stolen goods to legitimate businesses.

In nearly all cases where stolen goods were sold to legitimate businesses the burglar claimed the business buying the goods knew that they were stolen.

Nearly 80 per cent of respondents had stolen goods to order. In most such cases the orders were taken from family, friends and acquaintances, followed by drug dealers and fences.

The report confirmed earlier Bureau research indicating that heroin using burglars offend at a much higher rate (median rate = 13 burglaries a month) than burglars who are not heroin users (median rate = 9 burglaries a month).

Surprisingly, however, juveniles had a somewhat higher median rate of burglary (13 burglaries a month) than adults (9 burglaries a month).

The median earnings from burglary amongst all those interviewed were \$2000 per week.

However, the median burglary income was greater for adults (\$2,500/week) and heroin users (\$3,000/week) than for juveniles (\$1,000/week) and non-users of heroin (\$1,000/week).

*continued over ...*

Approximately two-thirds of burglars said they gave no thought to getting caught before committing a burglary, Nearly 20 per cent of those who sold stolen goods to drug dealers took no precautions to avoid police detection. Those who took precautions when disposing of goods through drug dealers reported using a variety of strategies to avoid police detection when disposing of stolen goods through drug dealers.

These included using a dealer they knew and trusted (40%), and using a variety of physical measures, such as phoning prior to delivery, using a middleman, monitoring police activity with a radio scanner and carrying a fake ID.

Nearly half of the burglars interviewed had exchanged their stolen goods for drugs within one hour of the burglary. More than 90 per cent had exchanged the goods within 24 hours.

The Bureau report recommended a number of strategies to help reduce the rate of break, enter and steal.

These included:

- focusing anti-theft surveillance operations on known or suspected drug dealers.
- constant monitoring of the means by which burglars dispose of stolen goods.
- intensive scrutiny of the transaction records of pawnbrokers/second-hand dealers.
- increasing the risk for businesses which trade in stolen goods.
- increasing the use of treatment for burglars addicted to cannabis or heroin.

**Further enquiries:**

Dr Don Weatherburn: 02 9231 9190 (wk), 0419 494 408 (mob)