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research notes

inside

Residential Burglary in Queensland

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this publication is to inform the public and policy makers about the nature, extent and causes of residential burglary in Queensland and to identify possible preventive strategies.

The questions addressed include:

- How common is residential burglary in Queensland?
- By how much has the rate of residential burglary increased over the last 20 years?
- How does Queensland compare with other States?
- Who is most at risk of being burgled?
- When and where do most residential burglaries occur?
- Who commits these offences?
- What can be done to reduce the risk of residential burglary?

We have chosen to focus on the offence of residential burglary for three reasons:

- ***Burglary affects a large number of households.*** According to police statistics, there was one burglary for every 38 residential dwellings in Queensland in 1994/95. Crime victims surveys, which include offences which have not been reported to the police, show a considerably higher rate of victimisation.

- ***Residential burglary has a substantial impact on the community.*** As a rough estimate, residential burglary costs Queensland around $100 million annually (based on Walker 1992). The large number of residential burglaries that are committed place significant strains on the police and the criminal justice system. For example, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) has estimated that it costs in excess of $6.5m annually to respond to residential break and enter offences.[1] There are also considerable emotional consequences for victims, who frequently experience anger, fear and a sense of violation. According to an American study, victims take, on average, four months to recover from the stress of being burgled (Cooketal. 1987).

- ***The community is becoming increasingly concerned about burglary.*** In a recent statewide crime and safety survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) burglary was the most commonly identified neighbourhood nuisance or crime problem (1995b).

Definitions

Residential burglary is commonly understood to involve an intrusion by an offender into a private dwelling to commit a crime. However, legal definitions of burglary are more technical. For example, section 419 of the Queensland *Criminal Code* contains the offence of breaking and entering a dwelling house with intent to commit a crime. The offence is known as "housebreaking" if the offence was committed during daylight hours and "burglary" only if the offence was committed at night (between 9p.m. and 6a.m.).

A break and enter of a place other than a dwelling does not fall within the legal definition of "burglary". A dwelling is defined as a building or structure kept for the residence of the owner, occupier and his or her family.

The new Criminal Code passed in Parliament in June1995, but not yet proclaimed, simplifies the law by creating a range of offences under the common title of "burglary". Under this broader offence, entry into non-residential premises, and break and enters committed during the day, also fall within the definition of burglary.

For the purposes of this paper, and in line with community understanding, all break and enter offences committed in relation to dwellings, regardless of the time of day or night, will be termed "residential burglary".

Data Sources

The main sources of information used for this paper are:

- recorded crime statistics collected and published by the QPS
- crime victims surveys undertaken by the ABS and the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (GSO)
- national uniform crime statistics compiled by the ABS
- statistics collected by the insurance industry.

RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY TRENDS IN QUEENSLAND

Police Statistics

Police crime statistics are the main source of data on long-term trends in residential burglary. However, it needs to be emphasised that these statistics only provide information about those offences which are reported, or otherwise become known, to the police and are recorded in a database. Findings from crime victims surveys (see below) suggest that only about 75 per cent of residential burglaries, and less than 30 per cent of attempted burglaries, are reported. Police statistics can also be affected by changes in recording practices and counting rules.

[1] Based on unpublished information provided by Corporate Planning Section, QPS.

Figure 1 shows that from 1974/75 to 1994/95 the number of residential burglaries recorded by the QPS increased by 440 per cent from 6,348 to 34,305.[2] This is equivalent to an annual average increase of 8.8 per cent.

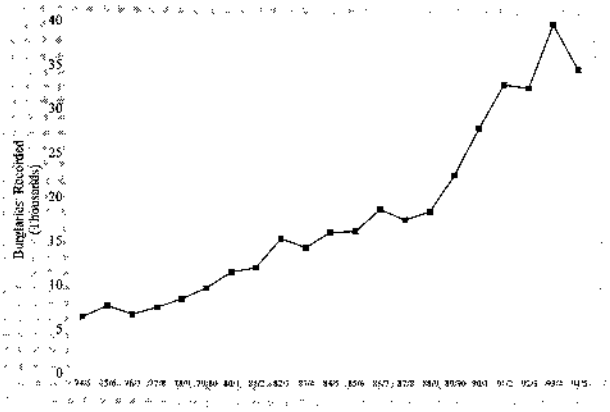

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF RECORDED RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES, QUEENSLAND (1974/75 – 1994/95)

Sources: QPS Information Resource Centre; QPS Statistical Review 1994/95.

Controlling for the effects of population growth, it is clear that there has been a very substantial increase in the "real" rate of recorded residential burglary. This is illustrated by Figure 2, which shows trends in the number of recorded residential burglaries expressed as a rate per 100,000 population and a rate per 1,000 residential dwellings.[3] (Of these two measures, the latter is probably the more appropriate risk measure, given that the contents of buildings, rather than individuals, are normally the target of burglaries.)

As shown by Figure 2, between 1974/75 and 1994/95 the number of offences per 100,000 population increased by 238 per cent from 309 to 1,045 – an average annual increase of 6.2 per cent.

The number of offences per 1,000 dwellings rose by 176 per cent from 9.6 to 26.5 – an average annual increase of 5.2 per cent. This was less than the rate of increase in offences per 100,000 population, due to a decline in the average number of people per dwelling in Queensland from 3.2 in 1974/75 to 2.5 in 1993/94.

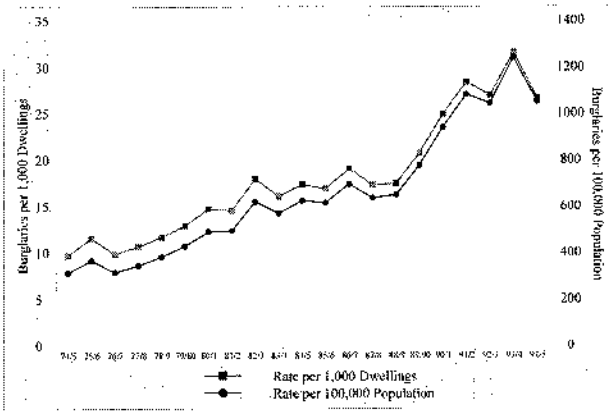

FIGURE 2: RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY RATES PER 1,000 DWELLINGS AND PER 100,000 POPULATION, QUEENSLAND (1974/75 – 1994/95)

Sources: QPS Information Resource Centre, 25 July 1995; QPS Statistical Review 1994/95; unpublished data provided by the GSO based on ABS Census of Population and Housing. Rate of residential dwellings from Census plus dwelling unit commencements, adjusted.

Crime Victims Surveys

Some additional information about long-term trends can be obtained from various crime victims surveys undertaken by the ABS and GSO. These surveys involve questioning a representative sample of the population to ascertain how many respondents had been the victim of one or more crimes in the preceding 12 months and whether those who had been victimised had reported the offence to the police.

Five surveys have collected data on the incidence and nature of residential burglary in Queensland. These are:

- *General Social Survey: Crime Victims, May 1975* (ABS 1979)
- *Crime Victims Survey, Australia, 1983* (ABS1984)
- *Crime Victims Survey, Queensland 1991* (GSO1991)
- *Crime and Safety, Australia, April 1993* (ABS1994)
- *Crime and Safety, Queensland, April 1995* (ABS1995b).

[2] The QPS data includes some cases involving only an attempted break-in. It is a matter for the officer(s) attending the scene to determine whether the offence amounted to an attempted break-in as opposed to, for example, wilful damage. It is not possible to distinguish attempts from completed offences in the QPS data, but the number of recorded attempted residential burglaries is likely to be fairly small, given the low reporting rate for such offences (see below) and the restrictive legal definition of attempt.

[3] The ABS defines a residential dwelling as an occupied or unoccupied private dwelling.

Due to changes in survey methodology and question format, only the 1993 and 1995 surveys are directly comparable (see, generally, CJC 1995b for a discussion of the methodological issues associated with these surveys). However, there are sufficient similarities in the various surveys to enable them to be used as a rough cross-check on the trends shown by police data.

Table 1 shows the number of residential burglaries/attempted burglaries per 1,000 households[4] recorded by each of the surveys. Households are counted only once, regardless of the number of times they were victimised in the preceding 12 months. Attempted burglaries have been included because the questionnaire used in the 1975 and 1983 surveys did not distinguish these offences from completed burglaries. However, there is some doubt about the reliability of the estimate of attempted burglary contained in the 1995 survey.

TABLE 1: RATE OF RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY/ATTEMPTED BURGLARY PER 1,000 HOUSEHOLDS, QUEENSLAND

	1975	1983	1991	1993	1995
Rate per 1,000 households	29	58	74	75	103
% change since 1975	-	100.0	155.2	158.6	255.2

Sources: ABS 1979, ABS 1984, GSO 1991, ABS 1994, ABS 1995b.

Table 1 confirms that the risk of being a victim of residential burglary in Queensland has risen markedly since the mid-1970s. The timing and magnitude of the increases recorded by the surveys are broadly consistent with the trends shown by police statistics, with the exception of the 1995 survey (see below).

Table 1 also shows that the rate of victimisation per 1,000 households as measured by the surveys is much higher than the victimisation rate recorded by the police. This is because:

- many residential burglaries are not reported to the police, especially if nothing was taken, or if the items stolen were uninsured (such as money)
- some offences which victims may classify as burglary may be recorded under different headings by the police (for example stealing or wilful damage).

[4] The ABS defines a household as a group of people who share common facilities and meals or who consider themselves to be a household. It is possible for a dwelling to contain more than one household.

Recent Trends: A Comparison of Police, Survey and Insurance Data

The 1995 ABS Queensland Crime and Safety Survey shows that between April 1993 and April 1995 there was a 37 per cent increase in the rate of residential burglary/attempted burglary per 1,000 households. This increase consisted of a 21 per cent rise in burglary and a 72 per cent jump in attempted burglaries. By contrast, QPS statistics show that the number of residential burglaries per 1,000 dwellings for 1994/95 was only 1.9 per cent higher than in 1992/93, having fallen by 13 per cent from the 1993/94 peak.

The discrepancy between police and survey statistics cannot be accounted for by a change in the reporting practices of victims, as a similar proportion of victimised households in the 1993 and 1995 surveys indicated that they had reported the offence to the police.

On 30 November 1994 the QPS introduced on a statewide basis a new computerised crime recording system known as CRISP. It could be that this new system has inadvertently affected the recording and counting of offences, even though the QPS has gone to great lengths to ensure comparability. Another possibility is that the 1995 ABS survey has overstated the increase in residential burglary over this period. This could have happened, for example, if respondents answering the survey had included offences which had occurred more than 12 months previously, at a time when the recorded residential burglary rate was at its peak.

A way of assessing these different explanations is to compare the trends shown by police and survey data with statistics on insurance claims. Most households now carry such policies; moreover, the extent of insurance coverage appears to have been reasonably stable in recent years.

Figure 3 shows the number of residential burglaries per 1,000 dwellings recorded by the QPS between 1988/89 and 1994/95 and the number of claims per 1,000 residential burglary policies made to insurance companies operating in Queensland. Figure 3 also shows the percentage of Queensland households in the 1993 and 1995 surveys which indicated that they had been burgled at least once in the preceding twelve months. (Households reporting an attempted burglary only have not been included.)

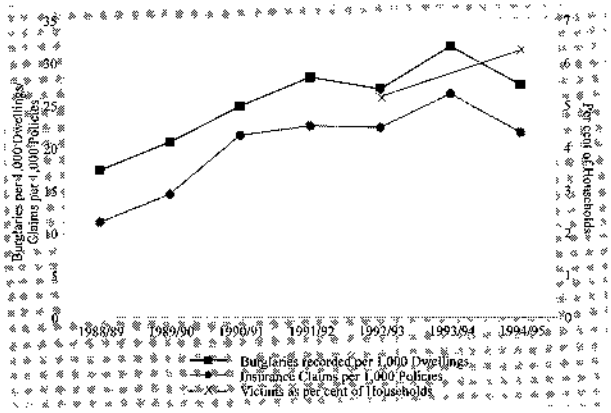

FIGURE 3: COMPARISON OF RECORDED BURGLARY RATES (PER 1,000 DWELLINGS), INSURANCE CLAIMS (PER 1,000 POLICIES) AND CRIME VICTIMS SURVEY RATES (PER CENT OF HOUSEHOLDS), QUEENSLAND (1988/89 – 1994/95)

Sources: ABS 1994; ABS 1995b; QPS Statistical Reviews 1988/89 – 1994/95; unpublished data on domestic theft and burglary claim trends received from Insurance Statistics Australia Ltd; estimates of residential dwellings based on ABS Census and building activity data provided by the GSO.

It is apparent from Figure 3 that the trend in insurance claims is very similar to that shown by police recorded crime statistics. Both data sources show that in 1994/95 the residential burglary rate returned to the level of the early 1990s. Because insurance companies generally require claimants to report burglaries to the police, this is a strong indication that the change in police recording systems in late 1994 did not significantly affect the comparability of police statistics. As noted, there appears to have been no change between 1993 and 1995 in the proportion of burglary victims reporting to police. On this basis, it seems likely that, for some reason, the 1995 survey has overstated the extent of the increase in the residential burglary rate since 1993.

Burglary Trends: Summary

Whichever measure is used, it is clear that since 1975 there has been a very significant rise in the residential burglary rate in Queensland. The most conservative measure – the number of recorded offences per 1,000 dwellings – shows a 176 per cent increase. Measures based on recorded offences per 100,000 population, and on household victimisation rates obtained from crime victims surveys, show increases well in excess of 200 per cent. Police and insurance industry statistics show that the rate of increase in the last few years has levelled off, apart from a marked peak in 1993/94. However, it is not possible to predict future trends with any confidence.

INTERSTATE COMPARISONS

Comparisons with other States can be made using both police statistics and crime victims survey data.

The ABS publication *National Crime Statistics January to December 1994* (NCS) presents standardised data for each Australian jurisdiction for a range of crime, including residential burglary.[5] Figure 4, which is based on NCS data, compares residential burglary rates per 100,000 population for all eight jurisdictions, plus Australia as a whole.

The NCS data show that the rate of victimisation is not consistent at the national level. Rates of recorded residential burglary per 100,000 population varied in 1994 from a low of 850 in Victoria to a high of 2,116 in Western Australia. According to these data, Queensland's rate of residential burglary victimisation was close to the national average. Only Victoria had unequivocally lower rates of recorded residential burglary than Queensland.

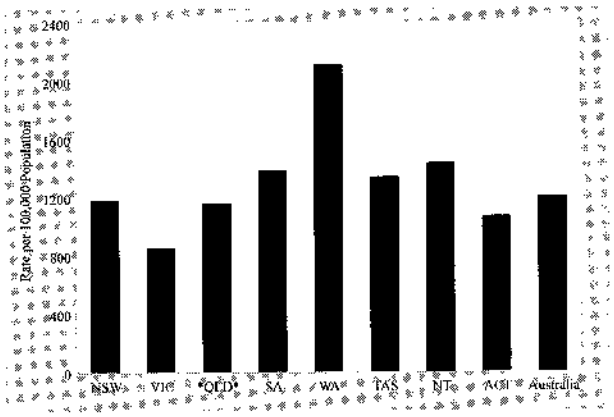

FIGURE 4: INTERSTATE COMPARISONS OF RECORDED RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY RATES PER 100,000 POPULATION (1994)

Source: ABS 1995a.

Note: Excludes offences relating to outbuildings.

Another source of interstate comparative data is the 1993 National Crime and Safety Survey and the various State surveys subsequently conducted by the ABS. Figure 5 presents data from the most recent available surveys conducted in each jurisdiction. Thefigure shows the percentage of households which indicated that they had been the victim of *at least one* burglary or attempted burglary during the year (whether or not it was reported to police).

[5] The specific offence category, used in the NCS, is entitled 'unlawful entry with intent'. This category includes some stealing offences from residential premises and is therefore somewhat broader than the definition of residential break and enter employed by the QPS.

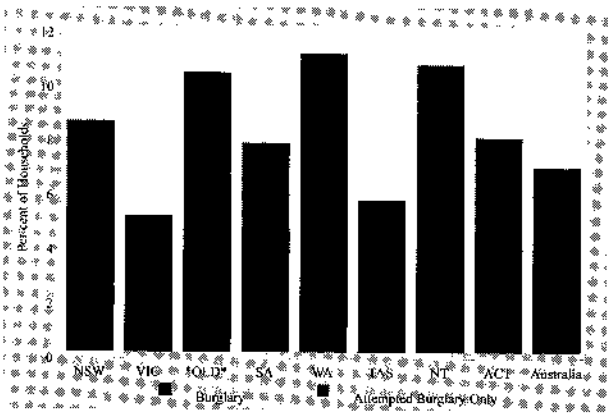

FIGURE 5: INTERSTATE COMPARISONS OF BURGLARY VICTIMISATION; PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS VICTIMISED AT LEAST ONCE IN PRECEDING 12 MONTHS

Sources: Western Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory, Australia: ABS 1994; other jurisdictions: state-level surveys conducted in 1995.

According to Figure 5, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory had residential burglary rates well above the national average. The percentage of households which experienced one or more attempted burglaries ranged from 1.9 per cent in Victoria to 4.0 per cent in Queensland.

As pointed out earlier in this paper, it is possible that the 1995 Queensland survey may have overstated the true current level of burglary, particularly in relation to attempted burglaries. Under these circumstances, the safest conclusion is probably that Queensland's rate of residential burglary is presently fairly close to the national average.

RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY CLEARANCE RATES

Police statistics show not only the number of offences recorded for a particular category of offence but also how many offences of that type are "cleared".

Offences can be considered cleared if, as a result of an investigation:

- one or more offenders were arrested, summonsed or cautioned, or information was laid for the purpose of bringing an offender before a court
- sufficient evidence exists for the arrest of the offender, but there is a bar to prosecution: for example, the victim refuses to proceed with the complaint or the offender is already in prison or some other institution.

The clearance rate is the number of recorded offences cleared in a given year divided by the total number of offences recorded over the same period.

Figure 6 shows the trend in annual clearance rates for residential burglary between 1989/90 and 1994/95. It indicates that, on average, only about 11 per cent of residential burglary offences reported to the police over this period were recorded as cleared.[6]

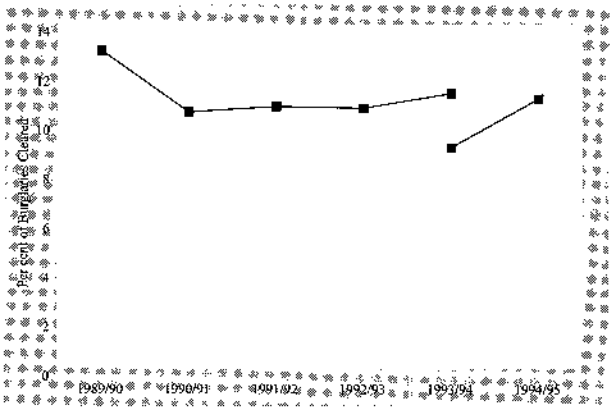

FIGURE 6: TREND IN RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY CLEARANCE RATES, QUEENSLAND (1989/90–1994/95)

Source: QPS Statistical Reviews 1989/90 – 1994/95.

Residential burglaries have a low clearance rate primarily because burglaries are rarely observed by anyone, thus making it difficult for police to locate perpetrators. By contrast, offences against the person, such as assaults, are frequently committed by someone known to the victim and/or are witnessed by someone else. Other considerations are:

- due to the sheer volume of burglaries that are committed, and the other demands on police time, police do not have the resources to thoroughly investigate many of the burglaries reported to them
- it has been relatively easy for burglars to dispose of stolen goods without being detected, because of the lack of identifying marks on property, the availability of "fences" and the existence of numerous outlets for second-hand goods.

[6] The break in the data before and after 1993/94 is due to the introduction of the CRISP system. Prior to the introduction of CRISP, clearance rates were calculated by dividing the numbers of crimes recorded as cleared during the year by the numbers of crimes recorded during that same year. Thus while the denominator referred only to incidents occurring in the year concerned, the numerator included clearances of incidents which may have occurred some years earlier. The new series, backdated to 1993/94, counts only those incidents which were cleared *within the year of occurrence*.

While there is always doubt about the comparability of historical data, published clearance rates have reduced in all jurisdictions for residential burglary in recent years. In the early 1970s, recorded clearance rates averaging around 20 per cent were the norm for most Australian jurisdictions, including Queensland (Dagger 1994).

Possible explanations for declining clearance rates are:

- the police may have become more careful about recording offences as cleared
- changing lifestyles may have made it increasingly difficult for police to solve residential burglaries: for example, the lack of potential witnesses in commuter-style suburbs and the portability of modern electronic goods.

WHAT GETS TAKEN?

According to the 1991 Queensland Crime Victims Survey, in one in five cases where a home was broken into nothing was stolen. Where something was taken, almost half of the offences involved the theft of property worth less than $500. About one-third involved more than $1,000 (GSO 1991). Figure 7 shows that the most common items stolen were cash, electronic equipment and jewellery. A common feature of these items is that they are easy to remove and relatively easy to dispose of.

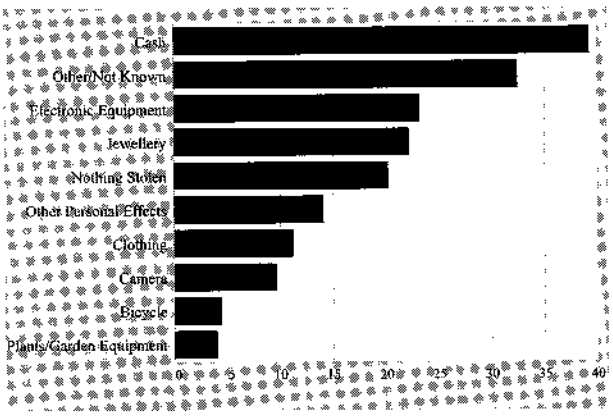

FIGURE 7: TYPES OF PROPERTY STOLEN IN RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES, QUEENSLAND (1991)

Source: GSO 1991.

Note: Percentages add up to more than 100 because more than one type of property may have been stolen.

Insurance statistics for 1994/95[7] show that the average insurance claim for a residential burglary in Queensland was $2,346, compared with the national average of $3,400. This amount includes the cost of property taken and the damage caused by the intruders.

As discussed earlier, only a small proportion of burglaries are cleared by police, and victims and insurance companies recoup only a small proportion of items stolen. Nevertheless, in a period of less than ten months the QPS Property Crime Squad recovered almost $3 million worth of stolen property.

WHEN DO BURGLARIES OCCUR?

The QPS does not report statistics on the time of day when burglaries are committed.[8] Victoria Police (1995) data show that residential burglary rates peak in the daytime during the working week and in the evening on weekends. These are times when occupants are most likely to be out at work, at school, or socialising. By contrast, most burglaries in other types of premises, such as shops, factories and schools, occur at night, when these building are most likely to be unoccupied. Burglars clearly prefer to target buildings when the occupants are most likely to be out.

QPS statistics indicate that the risk of a dwelling being burgled does not vary significantly according to the time of year.

REPEAT VICTIMISATION

There is considerable evidence from Australia and overseas that once a house has been targeted by burglars there is an increased risk of other burglaries occurring within a relatively short time. According to the 1995 Queensland Crime and Safety Survey, overall there was only a one in 16 chance of a dwelling being burgled during a year. However,

[7] Unpublished data on domestic theft and burglary trends received from Insurance Statistics Australia Ltd. The average insurance claim is the incurred cost of claims during a 12 month period ending 30 June 1995 divided by the number of claims reported. Insurance Statistics Australia Ltd trend data are an estimate only and do not include all Australian insurers.

[8] The QPS will be in a position to provide this information at some stage during 1996 with the implementation of its new statistical system.

there was more than a one in five likelihood that a household which had been burgled once during a year would be burgled again in the same 12 month period (Table 2).

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY VICTIMISATION, QUEENSLAND (1995)

Number of times burgled in previous 12 months	Total Households ('000)	Total Households (%)	Burgled Households (%)
0	1,125.7	93.7	–
1	59.3	4.9	77.8
2	12.8	1.1	17.5
3+	3.4	0.3	4.7
	1,201.2	100.0	100.0

Source: ABS 1995b.

Note: Excludes attempted burglaries.

Two main explanations of this phenomenon of "repeat victimisation" have been advanced by researchers (Farrell & Pease 1993). First, research on convicted burglars suggests that around one-third admit to returning to previously victimised dwellings, often to take things they had noticed the first time or, after waiting an appropriate time, to take the items replaced by insurance after the first incident. The second theory is that word gets around the criminal community that the burgled premises are an easy and profitable target, encouraging other offenders to make a call. Either way, such research suggests that tightening up security immediately after experiencing a burglary can reduce the risk of further victimisation.

EXPLAINING RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY

Key Risk Factors

Factors which are known to be related to the risk of residential burglary include:

- living in an urban location
- housing style
- leaving homes unattended for lengthy periods.

Urban Location

According to the International Crime Victims Surveys of 1989 and 1992 (van Dijk et al. 1990; van Dijk & Mayhew 1992), Australia's residential burglary rate was second only to New Zealand out of 20 industrialised countries.

Van Dijk and Mayhew (1992) concluded that there was a significant correlation between crime levels and urbanisation. The low-burglary countries in the international surveys, such as Switzerland, Norway, Finland and Northern Ireland, typically had fewer than a quarter of their population living in cities with over 100,000 population. By contrast, more than two-thirds of Australians live in large cities. The bustle and anonymity of a large city reduces the possibility of an offender being recognised as a stranger acting suspiciously, and also tends to attract those who earn a living through crime (Shover 1991). The anonymity of cities also makes it easier for offenders to find a market for their stolen goods.

As evidence of the significance of the urbanisation factor, in 1994/95 the rate of residential burglaries per 100,000 population in the Brisbane Metropolitan South Police Region was 2.6 times greater than that of Central Region, which takes in the provincial cities of Rockhampton, Mackay and Gladstone and a vast rural hinterland. At the extremes of the scale, a residence in the low income Brisbane suburb of Inala was about 30 times more likely to be burgled than a residence located in the small western towns of Miles or Blackall.

Housing Style

Data from the International Crime Victims Surveys suggest that another factor contributing to Australia's high burglary rate is the predominance of detached houses – a particularly popular form of housing in Queensland. Detached housing tends to give offenders easy access to properties without the risk of being seen by neighbours. In both Australia and New Zealand, around 80 per cent of respondents to the surveys lived in detached or semi-detached houses – four times the rate in some of the low-burglary countries (van Dijk & Mayhew 1992).

Unattended Dwellings

As to be expected, households which are left unattended for lengthy periods have a substantially greater risk of being burgled. For example, an analysis of the 1993 National Crime and Safety Survey undertaken by the GSO (1995) found that households in which there was usually no-one at home during the day had, on average, burglary rates 40 per cent above those of households where someone was normally at home (see also Phillips 1995). A related finding was that households made up entirely of persons aged 60 years and over had about a 40 per cent less risk of burglary. This is primarily due to elderly people being more likely to be at home during the day. An Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) study found that people who were regularly away from home for more than 10 hours on a working day were twice as likely to be burgled as those who rarely went out (AIC 1992).

Why Has Residential Burglary Become More Prevalent?

As discussed, there has been a very significant increase in the rate of residential burglary in Queensland since the mid-1970s. Other Australian jurisdictions have also experienced large increases over the same period, although the timing of these rises has varied (Grabosky 1995).

The increase in residential burglary rates is most likely due to a combination of the following factors:

- altered working and living styles – particularly the growth of dual income families – which has resulted in more households being left unattended during the day
- rapid urbanisation, which has contributed to the growth of communities characterised by high residential turnover and low social cohesion
- increased availability of valuable, portable and easily disposed of consumer goods (for example, video recorders, microwave ovens, compact discs) which are attractive to burglars
- the growth of a drug using sub-culture, some members of which may rely heavily on burglary as a source of income.

GEOGRAPHICAL COMPARISONS

The maps presented in the Appendix provide an indication of how residential burglary rates vary across Queensland. Map 1 shows the rate of residential burglaries per 100,000 population for all police districts in Queensland in 1994/95.[9] (On average, a police region contains about three districts.) It is evident from these maps that, with the exception of Cairns, the districts with the highest residential burglary rates are all located in the south-east corner. In turn, districts containing substantial provincial centres tend to have higher rates than districts of a predominantly rural nature.

Residential burglary rates per 100,000 population are also available for police divisions, which are smaller administrative units within districts. There are 277 police divisions in Queensland, ranging from one person stations in areas containing only a few hundred people, to large policing clusters covering urban areas with a population of 100,000 or more.

Map 2 presents divisional data for the south-east corner of Queensland and Map 3 provides an enlargement for the greater Brisbane area and the northern Gold Coast. These maps show that the police divisions with the highest rates are concentrated in the coastal tourist regions, the inner city areas of Brisbane, and a band of suburbs to the south of Brisbane, stretching from Ipswich to Beenleigh.

Table 3 lists the 25 police divisions which in 1994/95 had residential burglary rates which exceeded 1,500 per 100,000 population. In interpreting this table, the reader should be aware that the order of some divisions in the table could be altered by the addition, or subtraction, of only a few recorded offences. A further note of caution is that the data are for one year only: burglaries often occur in waves and it is quite possible that an area which scores high in one year could change its position considerably in the following year.

[9] As previously discussed, it is preferable to express burglary rates in terms of the number of burglaries per 1,000 dwellings. However, these data were not available at a District or Division-level.

TABLE 3: POLICE DIVISIONS WITH RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY RATES EXCEEDING 1,500 PER 100,000 POPULATION, QUEENSLAND (1994/95)

Division	QPS Region	Residential Burglaries per 100,000 population
Surfers Paradise	South Eastern	3,537
Inala	Metro South	3,321
Brisbane City	Metro North	3,182
Dutton Park	Metro South	3,008
Cairns	Far Northern	2,704
Beenleigh	South Eastern	2,663
Fortitude Valley	Metro North	2,485
West End	Metro South	2,423
Annerley	Metro South	2,262
Coorparoo	Metro South	2,181
Logan Central	South Eastern	2,179
Clayfield	Metro North	2,062
Dunwich	Metro South	1,971
Browns Plains	South Eastern	1,921
Sherwood	Metro South	1,874
Noosa Heads	North Coast	1,795
Broadbeach	South Eastern	1,790
Morningside	Metro South	1,717
Southport	South Eastern	1,583
Ipswich	Southern	1,567
Burleigh Heads	South Eastern	1,531
Acacia Ridge	Metro South	1,522
Moorooka	Metro South	1,512
Redcliffe	North Coast	1,509
Coolangatta	South Eastern	1,501

Source: QPS Information Resource Centre.

Key features of this table are as follows:

- All but three Divisions – Cairns, Noosa Heads and Dunwich (which covers North Stradbroke Island) – are located in the Brisbane or Gold Coast urban areas.

- Tourist destinations – Cairns, the Gold Coast and Noosa Heads – figure prominently in the list. To some extent the statistics in Table 3 overstate the comparative risk in these locations because, for much of the year, their actual population is much larger than their resident population, due to the influx of tourists. However, these areas also have characteristics which make them attractive to burglars, including a relatively large number of unattended dwellings and a high level of anonymity, which makes it easier for burglars to operate undetected.

- There is an over-representation of Divisions in city and inner suburban neighbourhoods (for example Brisbane City, Fortitude Valley, Dutton Park, West End and Annerley). Factors which contribute to the vulnerability of these areas include the following:

  – relatively few families with young children live in these localities: hence, there is a greater likelihood of households being unoccupied during the day

  – it is comparatively easy for burglars to operate unnoticed, as a stranger is less likely to seem out of place than in a quiet suburban community

  – such areas are at the conjunction of major transport routes, and so can be relatively easily accessed (and exited).

- Divisions covering lower income outer suburbs, such as Inala, Beenleigh and Logan, are also over-represented. The most likely explanation for this finding is that those who commit burglaries – especially of a more "opportunistic" nature – are themselves more likely to reside in such areas. As discussed below, most burglars come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Research on the "work patterns" of burglars indicates that many tend to operate fairly close to where they live or "hang out", presumably because they are more familiar with these areas and access to and from them is easier (Rengert & Wasilchick 1985; Brantingham & Brantingham 1984).

WHO COMMITS RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES?

Most of what we know about burglars is based on information collected about offenders who have been detected by the police. Given that only a small proportion of burglary offences are cleared, this group may not necessarily be representative of the total population of burglars.

Age and Gender

Figure 8 presents data on the age and gender of persons arrested or cautioned for burglary in Queensland in 1992. The figure includes data on offenders apprehended for burglaries of commercial and 'other' premises, as well as residential dwellings.

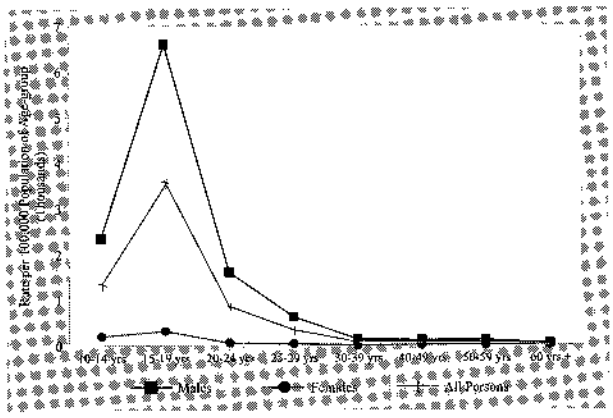

FIGURE 8: AGE AND GENDER PROFILES OF ARRESTED/ CAUTIONED BURGLARY OFFENDERS, QUEENSLAND (1992)

Source: Unpublished data provided by QPS.

Figure 8 shows that:

- most burglary offenders apprehended by the police are male
- the peak age for offending is the 15 – 19 year old bracket, after which involvement in burglaries rapidly decreases.

Similar patterns have been observed in other jurisdictions in Australia and overseas (Ross et al. 1994; Barclay 1990). However, the over-representation of young offenders may partly be the result of them being less experienced and more likely to be apprehended. Young offenders also tend to commit offences in groups, as a result of which several offenders may be apprehended for a single burglary (CJC 1995a).

Drug Use and Burglary

There is considerable evidence from other jurisdictions that many burglaries are committed by people who need money to support an illicit drug habit. For instance, a 1984 study of New South Wales prisoners detained for property offences found that heroin users committed significantly more burglaries, armed robberies and frauds than non-users. The main source of income for 87 per cent of heroin users was property crime compared to less than 36 per cent of non-users (Dobinson & Ward 1985).

Not all heroin dependent people get involved in burglary. Another survey of heroin users presenting for treatment found that 48 per cent had never seriously considered stealing in order to support their dependency (Dobinson & Ward 1987). Overall, the evidence suggests that heroin dependence exacerbates offending among those already committing crimes, rather than actually causing a law-abiding person to turn to a life of crime.

A characteristic of the serious addict-burglar appears to be extremely high rates of offending, so it is possible that a small number of drug users could be responsible for a large proportion of all residential burglaries, even though many drug users are not involved in crime at all. This interpretation is supported by the QPS Property Crime Squad, which believes that the majority of recidivist property offenders are supporting a drug habit.

Recent New South Wales research, based on interviews of juvenile offenders in detention centres, indicates that a significant motivation for young property offenders may be to obtain money with which to purchase cannabis (Salmelainen 1995).

Unemployment

According to an analysis by the QPS Property Crime Squad of Court Briefs for offenders arrested for property crimes between September 1994 and July 1995:

- almost 80 per cent were unemployed at the time of arrest
- a further seven per cent were students or pensioners
- only 13 per cent were employed.

However, the relationship between unemployment and crime is complex. Research has often shown that areas of high unemployment also have high burglary rates, but rarely has it been shown that burglary rates increase when unemployment worsens, or decrease when unemployment improves (Weatherburn 1992).

A recent study suggests that long-term unemployment is much more likely to be associated with involvement in burglary than short-term unemployment (Borooah & Collins 1995). It would follow, then, that those regions afflicted with chronic unemployment would also suffer high burglary rates. This interpretation seems to fit some of the regional patterns described above. Unemployment does not necessarily drive people to burglary but for some people, in some circumstances, it can become the best – if not the only – way of generating income.

TACKLING THE PROBLEM OF RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY

A very useful discussion of strategies for reducing burglary can be found in a recently released AIC Trends and Issues Paper, *Burglary Prevention* (Grabosky 1995). The following discussion broadly follows the format of that paper.

Individual Responses

Individuals can take a number of simple precautions to reduce the risk of residential burglary. Many of these strategies are explained in brochures readily available from any police station or from the Crime Prevention Unit of the QPS. Older residents, and people with disabilities, can also obtain assistance with home security through the QPS Home Secure Program.

The factors that are most effective in deterring burglars are visibility, occupancy and delay. Alarms can also be an effective – if somewhat expensive – deterrent.

Visibility. The most attractive burglary target is one which provides cover, isolation and the minimum opportunity for possible observation by others (Taylor & Nee 1988). The more a dwelling can be seen from the street or by neighbours and passers-by, the less desirable it will be as a target for burglars.

Reasonable external house lighting can help deter those burglars who operate at night. Flood lights which activate automatically when movement is detected near the home are another alternative security measure.

Landscaping should be designed so that it does not easily conceal burglars. Sensible placement of trees, shrubs, walls and fences, can deprive burglars of hiding places.

Occupancy. Clues that signal a lack of occupancy are very important in target selection by burglars (Maguire & Bennet 1982). Despite the recent attention given to the issue of "home invasions", most burglars have no desire to enter a dwelling if they think that someone might be inside.

One of the most effective burglary prevention measures is to maintain a "lived in" appearance for dwellings:

- simple timing devices for interior or exterior lights can be programmed to give the appearance that the residence is occupied
- a car in the driveway or a radio playing in the background have been shown to reduce the attractiveness of potential targets to burglars (Wright et al. 1995)
- prior to any extended absence, occupants should cancel all deliveries (e.g. milk, newspapers, etc.) and make arrangements to have mail re-directed or collected daily by a neighbour or a friend.

Target Hardening and Delay. Even the most sophisticated physical protection measures may not deter a determined offender, but many burglaries can be prevented by making entry difficult.

Locked doors and windows are the first line of defence against a would-be burglar. A recent survey of burglary victims undertaken by the QPS Crime Prevention Unit found that, according to the victims, nearly one-half of burglars gained entry through an unlocked window or door. Solid doors fitted with sturdy locks are preferred. Locks should also be considered for sliding doors and windows. Spare keys should never be left in a "convenient hiding place" such as under a door mat or in a flower pot – these are usually the first places a burglar will look.

It should be stressed that the object of anti-burglary precautions ought not be to turn the suburb or the home into a fortress or a prison. Strategies which are commonly used in more crime-ridden countries, such as placing steel grilles on doors and windows, or enclosing houses and suburbs with high walls and imposing gates, are rarely necessary and lead to increasing levels of community anxiety and distrust.

Alarms. Greater numbers of people are now installing electronic alarm systems to deter burglars. The most effective alarm systems are those that are highly visible, audible and linked to a security service which monitors the alarm system and can initiate an appropriate response (Grabosky 1995). However, these types of alarm systems can be expensive, especially for protecting private premises, and will not stop a determined burglar. Having a dog which barks at strangers is a much cheaper deterrent and may be just as effective under some circumstances (Wright et al. 1995).

Reducing the Impact of Burglary. Even if burglaries cannot be prevented, there are steps which people can take to reduce the impact of these offences.

- The best place to store valuables such as jewellery, money and important papers is in a secure location such as a bank.

- Marking valuable property leaves no doubt as to ownership. Simple identification marks on property reduces its saleability – and therefore attractiveness – to burglars, and assists the police to identify stolen property that has been recovered.

Police Responses

A commonly proposed solution to rising crime rates is to increase the number of police patrolling the streets. However, such initiatives, while perhaps justifiable on other grounds, are unlikely to have much of an impact on the problem of residential burglary. A recent report has suggested that each potential burglary target, such as a house or shop, could expect coverage by police on patrol for an average of about 32 seconds per day (New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1995). This means that even if the number of police patrols were to be doubled, the typical dwelling or business would still only be under surveillance for an average of around 60 seconds a day.

Although extra patrols might not be the answer, there are other ways in which the police can help reduce the incidence of residential burglary. For example:

- The police can make it harder for burglars to earn income by identifying and targeting the persons and premises used in the distribution of stolen property, particularly large-scale, organised receivers. This approach has recently been used with considerable success by the QPS Property Crime Squad.

- As discussed above, people who have been burgled once are at a much greater risk than the general population of being burgled again within a relatively short time. It has been shown in other jurisdictions that police have been able to achieve a reduction in burglaries by providing intensive security advice and support to victims in the aftermath of a burglary, and enlisting the local community to assist in the surveillance of recently burgled premises (Tilley 1993; Anderson et al. 1995).

More generally, the police should be encouraged to adopt an "experimental" approach to tackling the problem of residential burglary. This can be done by concentrating resources on identified high risk areas and trialling different strategies for reducing the incidence of burglary in those areas. By conducting these trials on a regular basis, and ensuring that they are properly evaluated, it should be possible to build up a stock of knowledge about which policing strategies work under what circumstances and identify the approaches which are not effective.

Policing initiatives aimed at reducing the incidence of residential burglary will have the greatest chance of success if they:

- involve representatives of the local community and other agencies in project development and implementation

- are "information driven"; that is, strategies are selected on the basis of a careful analysis of the characteristics of the community concerned and its "burglary profile".

Community Responses

One function which local communities are able to perform much more effectively than the police is that of *surveillance*. As discussed above, random police patrols can provide coverage of particular locations for only a tiny fraction of the day. The job of the police would be made much easier if people took on greater responsibility for looking out for each other, and for reporting any suspicious activity to the police. This does not necessarily require people to join formal organisations such as Neighbourhood Watch. Informal arrangements amongst small groups of neighbours may work just as well in some circumstances.

Local communities can also play a role in devising effective burglary reduction strategies for their areas. However, communities with high burglary rates are frequently the most difficult to mobilise, due to high residential mobility and low social cohesion. Hence, local crime reduction programs may need to be integrated into broader strategies designed to increase community cohesiveness and cooperation.

Designing Out Crime

State and local governments, community planners, developers and architects should be encouraged to take burglary reduction strategies into consideration when designing communities and buildings. For example:

- proper planning of suburbs by councils and developers can ensure that each house is observable by neighbours or by patrolling police
- streets can be laid out in such a way as to make them unattractive thoroughfares to burglars, who generally like to be able to enter and leave areas quickly and to have multiple escape routes available
- new communities can be designed with a view to promoting social contact among neighbours and avoiding the creation of socially isolating "dormitory suburbs"
- architects and developers can be provided with incentives to design buildings which balance crime prevention and aesthetic considerations (Grabosky 1995).

Reducing the Propensity to Offend

The above discussion has focused on reducing the opportunities for burglars, as this is where the greatest gains can be achieved in the short to medium term. However, governments and the community in general must also address the factors that lead people to commit residential burglary and other crimes. Tackling the causes of crime requires the development of appropriate responses to the problems of unemployment, substance abuse and juvenile delinquency. Other research in which the CJC is currently involved – most notably, the Queensland Sibling Study project being undertaken jointly with the University of Queensland, Griffith University and Bond University – is designed to address some of these broader issues. It is hoped that this study will lead to the development of a better understanding of the factors associated with juvenile involvement in crime, including property crime.

CONCLUSION

Key Findings

- Residential burglary has a substantial financial impact on the Queensland community, costing approximately $100 million annually. The emotional costs of burglary are also high.

- The number of residential burglaries per 1,000 dwellings recorded by the QPS increased by 176 per cent in the 20 years from 1974/75 to 1994/95. Crime victims surveys also show a large increase in burglary victimisation over this period.

- According to the most recent available statistics, residential burglary rates in Queensland are not especially high compared with other Australian jurisdictions.

- Only around 11 per cent of residential burglaries reported to the QPS are cleared. This is primarily due to the fact that burglary is rarely witnessed by anyone. It has also been relatively easy for burglars to dispose of stolen property without detection.

- According to recent insurance industry data for Queensland, the average insurance claim for burglary and theft from residences was around $2,300. Cash, electronic equipment and jewellery are the most commonly stolen items.

- Persons living in large cities, those who live in detached houses, and those who leave their home empty for long periods of the day, are at greater risk of being burgled.

- Homes which have been burgled once face a significantly increased risk of being burgled again within a relatively short time.

- The increase in residential burglary rate over the last two decades is most likely due to rapid urbanisation, altered working and living styles, the growth of an illicit drug sub-culture, and the increased availability of valuable and easily disposable consumer goods.

- Areas with the highest residential burglary rates in Queensland are the coastal tourist regions, the inner city areas of Brisbane, and a band of suburbs to the south of Brisbane stretching from Ipswich to Beenleigh.

- The great majority of burglars detected by police are young males and are from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Heavy users of illicit drugs appear to be the most active offenders.

Burglary Reduction Strategies

- Individuals can reduce the risk of residential burglary by relatively simple, cheap measures, such as by making it harder for burglars to break into dwellings without being noticed, maintaining a "lived in" appearance for the home, and utilising suitable door and window locks.

- The police can increase their effectiveness by identifying and targeting receivers of stolen property and focusing on reducing the risk of repeat victimisation. More generally, the police should be encouraged to trial innovative burglary reduction strategies that are information driven and targeted at high risk areas.

- Random police patrols can provide coverage of particular locations for only a tiny fraction of the day. Potentially the best form of surveillance is that provided by community members themselves.

- State and local governments, community planners, developers and architects need to take burglary reduction strategies into consideration when designing communities and buildings.

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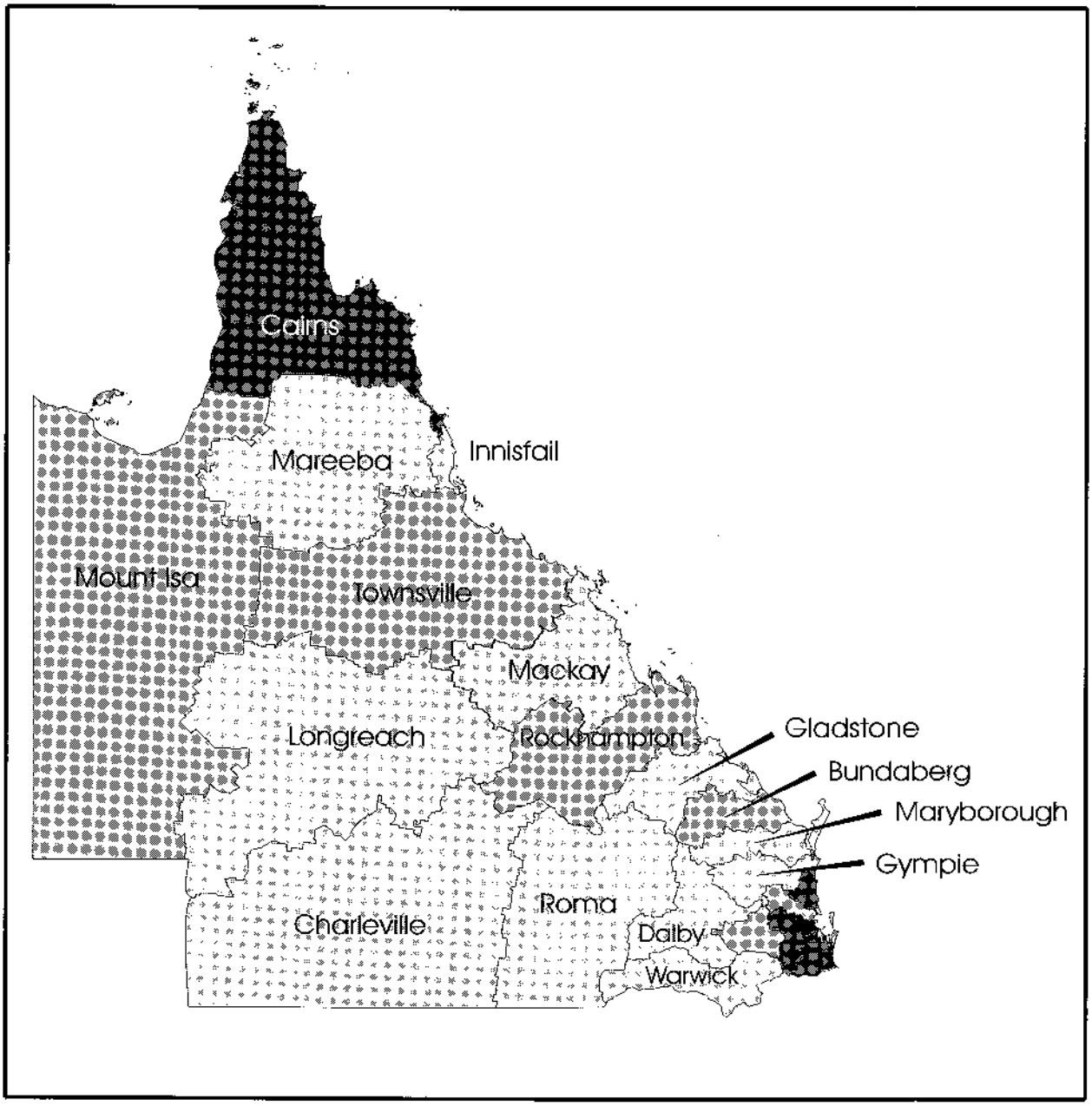
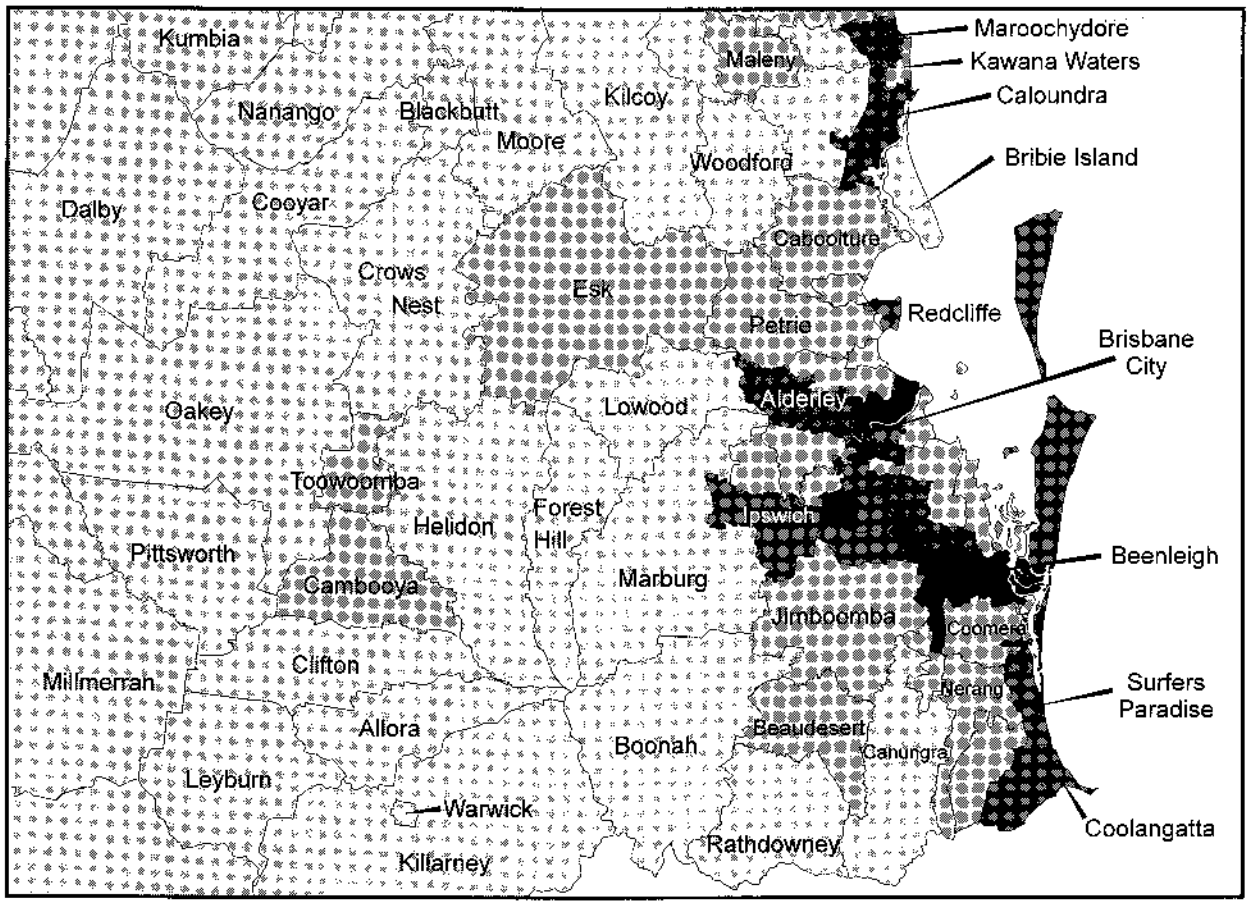
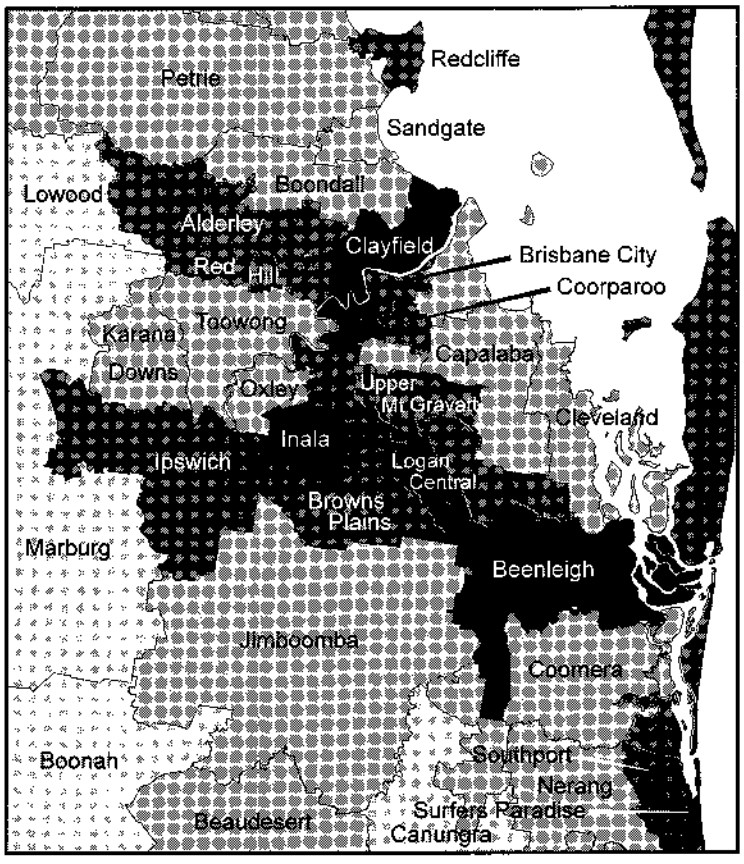
APPENDIX



MAP 1: RECORDED RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES PER 100,000 POPULATION, QPS DISTRICTS, QUEENSLAND (1994/95)



MAP 2: RECORDED RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES PER 100,000 POPULATION, QPS DIVISIONS, SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND (1994/95)



MAP 3: RECORDED RESIDENTIAL BURGARLIES PER 100,000 POPULATION, QPS DIVISIONS, GREATER BRISBANE AREA AND NORTHERN GOLD COAST (1994/95)

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