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In reply please quote:

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MEDIA RELEASE

'Home invasions' and robberies

Home invasion is nowhere near as common as media treatment of the problem would seem to suggest, according to a new report on home invasions and robberies released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

Home invasion is defined in the report as an armed robbery occurring on private residential premises.

In 1995 a total of 158 home invasions were reported to the NSW police. Of these, 80 per cent were reported to have occurred in the Sydney Statistical Division.

Thus, on a per capita basis, the recorded rate of home invasion in Sydney last year was just 0.34/10,000 of population.

In fact a substantial proportion (40%) of the home invasions recorded in Sydney last year occurred in just a four Local Government Areas. These were South Sydney (8 cases), Blacktown (20 cases), Fairfield (14 cases) and Parramatta (9 cases).

The report points out that the most common form of robbery in Sydney is not a home invasion but an unarmed robbery on the street or somewhere else outdoors.

Over half of all robberies recorded by police in 1995 occurred in these locations. In sixty-five per cent of them the offender was unarmed.

The next most common form of robbery is a robbery of business or commercial premises. These types of robberies accounted for about 23 per cent of all robbery incidents recorded by the NSW Police in 1995.

The most common targets in commercial robbery offences are service stations and chemists. Sixteen per cent of robberies of commercial premises in 1995 involved robberies of service stations, while 8 per cent involved robberies of chemists.

The majority of persons arrested for robbery offences are convicted and the majority of those convicted are given prison terms.

However rates of unarmed robbery and robbery with a weapon other than a firearm rose by seven per cent and 27 per cent respectively, over the period April 1994 to December 1995.

Rates of robbery with a firearm remained stable over the same period.

Commenting on the findings in the report, the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, cautioned that the true level of home invasion could be somewhat higher than the official figures suggest.

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‘This is because some victims of home invasion may be threatened with reprisal if they report the incident to police’

‘At the same time, media attention to the problem of home invasion should not be allowed to divert attention from the more common problems of street and commercial robbery, he said.

According to Dr Weatherburn there is no simple solution to the problem of reducing either the incidence of home invasions and robberies.

‘The number of offenders involved in home invasions is probably quite small but unless victims of home invasion actively assist police in identifying and prosecuting offenders, it is difficult to control the incidence of this offence’, he said.

‘Police patrols have been shown to be an effective deterrent to street robbery but they need to be targeted at the areas and times of highest risk’.

‘The risk of robbery on commercial premises can be reduced by visible security and a clearly advertised policy of keeping only small amounts of cash on the premises’.

Dr Weatherburn also argues that robbery rates could also be reduced if a larger proportion of robbery offenders could be encouraged onto methadone programs.’

‘An earlier study of robbery by the Bureau revealed that nearly 45 per cent of armed robbery offenders and 17 per cent of (non-armed) robbery offenders were drug users with the majority of these being regular users of heroin’.

‘Recent research conducted by Dr James Bell at the Prince of Wales Hospital has shown that when heroin-dependent offenders enter methadone programs their rates of offending fall by up to 50 per cent.’

‘So methadone treatment also provides an effective strategy for reducing the incidence of robbery’.

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