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In reply please quote:

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MEDIA RELEASE

Crime trends in New South Wales: The Crime Victim Survey picture

Despite recent increases in recorded crime reported by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, the risk of violent crimes such as robbery actually remains fairly low.

This surprising finding has emerged from a compilation of results from annual crime victim surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on behalf of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and the NSW Police Service since 1990.

These annual surveys involve interviews with a representative sample of over 10,000 NSW residents.

Because they can detect crimes not reported to police (as well as reported crime) they are regarded as providing a more accurate picture of the prevalence of most major personal and property crimes than is provided by offences recorded by police.

The surveys reveal, for instance, that less than 0.5 per cent of NSW residents aged over 15 years (i.e. less than less person in 200) fell victim to any kind of robbery (i.e. theft involving violence or the threat of violence) during 1997.

Even assault, which is a far more prevalent offence than robbery, affected less than four per cent of the NSW population during 1997. The prevalence of sexual assault (on persons aged 18 years and over) has remained under one per cent since 1992.

The victim survey data also call into question some of the increases in crime recorded by the NSW Police. Although police reports of vehicle theft have risen, for instance, the victim surveys show no significant increase in the prevalence of this kind of crime.

The percentage of households touched by vehicle theft has remained steady at about two per cent since 1992.

Except for assault, public willingness to report crime to police has also changed very little since the start of the decade.

Public willingness to report crime is highest for motor vehicle theft, and break and enter. Nearly 100 per cent of victims report the former and nearly 80 per cent of victims report the latter.

About 60 per cent of robbery victims report the offence to police. Public willingness to report crime is lowest for sexual assault, which (when it has been able to be measured) has been reported to police by less than 30 per cent of victims.

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While willingness to report offences such as motor vehicle theft, break and enter, robbery and sexual assault appears to have shown no systematic upward or downward trend, public willingness to report assault has substantially increased.

The percentage of victims of this offence reporting it to police has increased from around 30 per cent in 1990 to more than 40 per cent in 1997.

The survey data also contains a few surprises in relation to public perceptions of crime.

The proportion of NSW residents who consider that they *do not* have a crime or public nuisance problem in their neighbourhood has remained *above* 40 per cent since 1990.

Among those who do see their neighbourhood as having a crime or public nuisance problem, the kinds of problems which cause greatest concern have also changed very little.

Around 20 per cent consider that house burglaries are their major problem. The next most common concern is dangerous/noisy driving, which is perceived by about 10 per cent to be their major problem. The third most commonly cited 'main' problem in the neighbourhood is the presence of 'louts/youth gangs'.

Commenting on the findings the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, said that the ABS surveys highlighted the need to keep the recent increases in crime recorded by police in some perspective.

"It is likely, for example, that some of the increase in assault they have recorded has come about simply because of greater public willingness to report the offence."

"It is also clear that, despite the significant increases in robbery police have recorded, the prevalence of this offence remains quite low."

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