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## MEDIA RELEASE

### Social and economic stress, child neglect and juvenile delinquency

For every new 1,000 neglected children, New South Wales gets 256 new juvenile offenders, according to research findings released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

These 256 juveniles, between them, will make an estimated 466 Children's Court appearances and will commit an unknown (though larger) number of crimes.

The report, which represents the most comprehensive statistical analysis of the interrelationship between poverty, child neglect and juvenile crime ever undertaken in Australia, contains a number of surprising findings.

The percentage of poor families (i.e. families earning less than \$16,000 per annum) in a postcode is more important as a cause of juvenile crime than the level of unemployment.

Both child neglect and child abuse significantly increase the risk of juvenile involvement in crime but child neglect is more important as a cause of juvenile involvement in both property and violent crime than child abuse.

Interestingly, however, the influence of child abuse on juvenile involvement in violent crime is nearly four times stronger than its influence on juvenile involvement in property crime.

Commenting on the findings, the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, said that they contained important implications for both State and Federal Governments.

State and Territory Government efforts to support families and protect children from neglect and abuse should be seen as the front line of their attack on crime.

"Recent research by the Rand Corporation in the United States has shown that, dollar for dollar, investment in effective child protection programs produces a greater long-term reduction in crime than investment in longer gaol terms."

"However State and Territory Governments cannot combat child neglect and abuse effectively if Federal Government economic policy is geared solely toward promoting economic growth".

"Policies which produce economic growth but increase the percentage of families living in poverty or which concentrate them in certain neighbourhoods will ultimately produce higher rates of juvenile involvement in crime."

"The last two decades in Australia have seen a progressive geographic concentration of poverty."

"As a result, those who are at risk of child neglect are increasingly being concentrated in areas which already contain higher than usual levels of participation in crime."

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“Since association with delinquent peers itself stimulates involvement in crime, one effect of such concentration may be to magnify the effects of poverty on the rate of initiation into crime”.

“That may be one reason why recorded rates of crime in Australia increased markedly over the period 1973/4 -1988/9”.

“National economic policy clearly needs to be fashioned, not just with a view to promoting economic growth, but with a view to ensuring that the proceeds of that growth reduce the magnitude and concentration of poverty in Australia.”

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