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MEDIA RELEASE

Trends in sentencing in New South Wales Criminal Courts: 1990-2000

Courts have become more willing to imprison offenders and, for some offences, are also handing out longer gaol terms, according to the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

The Bureau examined sentencing trends for a variety of offence categories in both the Local and Higher Criminal Courts of NSW over the ten year period from 1990 to 2000.

In the Higher Criminal Courts (which deal with more serious types of crime) the likelihood of a prison sentence increased for assault, sexual offences against children, robbery, break and enter and fraud.

For some categories of offence the increases were quite substantial. The percentage of offenders given a prison term rose by 26 per cent for fraud-related offences, 22 per cent for assault and 20 per cent for sexual offences against children.

The average length of prison terms handed out by the Higher Criminal Courts generally remained stable except for robbery, where the average prison term declined.

The decline in the average prison term for robbery, however, simply reflects the fact that less serious offenders are now being given prison terms where before many received non-custodial penalties.

In the Local Courts (which deal with the vast majority of persons charged with criminal offences) the percentage of persons given a prison term has generally remained stable.

The percentage of persons convicted of break and enter who receive a prison term, however, rose from 33.7 per cent (in 1993) to 41.4 per cent (in 2000), an increase of seven per cent.

The average minimum term for people convicted in the Local Courts of dealing or trafficking in opiates also increased from 5.3 months to 6.7 months.

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