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In reply please quote:

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Media Release

The attrition of sexual offences from the New South Wales criminal justice system Embargo: Friday, 17 March 2006, 10.30AM

A new report by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research shows that only one in ten of the more than 7,000 sexual and indecent assault incidents reported to NSW Police each year result in someone being found guilty in court.

The Bureau followed up more than 3,752 sexual offence incidents involving a victim aged 0-15 and 4,132 sexual offence incidents involving victims aged 16 years and over.

The 180 day clear-up rate for incidents involving children was 27.8 per cent, while the corresponding clear-up rate for incidents involving adults was 31.7 per cent.

Criminal proceedings were initiated in 46.8 per cent of the cleared incidents involving child victims and 58.7 per cent of the cleared incidents involving adult victims.

Six months after reporting, therefore, only 15 percent of sexual offence incidents involving a child victim and 19 percent of incidents involving an adult victim reported to police had resulted in the initiation of criminal proceedings.

Of the people who had criminal proceedings commenced against them, less than half ended up convicted.

Commenting on the findings the director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, said they were a matter of serious concern.

“Sexual assault is one of those offences where the threat of imprisonment can be expected to exert a significant deterrent effect. That deterrent effect is eroded when the risk of apprehension and successful prosecution is low.”

Dr Weatherburn attributed the low prosecution and conviction rates partly to reluctance on the part of sexual assault victims to put themselves through the trauma of a court process and partly to the difficulties involved in proving sexual offences where the only evidence is the victim's testimony.

“The best way to reduce the stress associated with the prosecution and court process is to provide victims of sexual assault with emotional support and encouragement from the moment when they first report the offence to police through to the end of the prosecution process”, he said.

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