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In reply please quote:

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MEDIA RELEASE

Long-term trends in property and violent crime:

Recorded rates of murder, robbery with a firearm, burglary and car theft are at their lowest levels in 15 years (i.e. since 1990). However recorded rates of sexual assault and assault have more than doubled over this period, according to a new report on long-term crime trends released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

The Bureau examined long-term trends in the recorded rates of murder, assault, sexual assault, other sexual offences, robbery with a firearm, robbery with a weapon other than a firearm, unarmed robbery, break and enter (dwelling and non-dwelling) and motor vehicle theft between 1990 and 2004.

The recorded rate of murder and robbery with a firearm fell steadily between 1990 and 2004. As a result, the murder rate is now 50 per cent lower than it was in 1990, while the rate of robbery with a firearm is 41 per cent lower.

The recorded rate of assault, sexual assault and other sexual offences rose steadily over the period between 1990 and 2004. As a result, the recorded rate of assault is now 105 per cent higher than it was in 1990, the recorded rate of sexual assault is 132 per cent higher and the recorded rate of 'other' sexual offences is 85 per cent higher.

Non-firearm robbery, burglary and car theft increased in the latter half of the 1990s, peaked in the late 1990s and then fell rapidly from 2001 onwards.

Robbery without a weapon, for example, more than doubled between 1990 and 2001 but then fell by 39 per cent between 2001 and 2004. Similarly, robbery with a weapon other than a firearm almost tripled between 1990 and 2001 but then almost halved between 2001 and 2004. Rates of both offences remain significantly higher than they were in 1990 but both have continued to decline since 2004.

A similar pattern of rising and then falling crime is evident for break and enter and motor vehicle theft. However the recorded rate of break and enter (dwelling) is now 17 per cent lower than it was in 1990, the recorded rate of break and enter (non-dwelling) is 29 per cent lower and the recorded rate of motor vehicle theft is 47 per cent lower.

Commenting on the findings, the director of the Bureau said that the fall in property crime was the result of a combination of factors, including better vehicle security, a reduction in heroin use, rising real incomes, falling unemployment and rising rates of imprisonment.

'The rise in assault and sexual assault is harder to explain but the upward trend should be treated with a degree of caution', he said. There is no evidence that victims of these offences have become more willing to report them to police but new laws requiring mandatory reporting of child abuse and rising public concern about child sexual assault and domestic violence may have made other witnesses (e.g. teachers, doctors, welfare workers, neighbours) more willing to report them'.

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