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Ombudsman reports on policing of domestic violence

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The Ombudsman tabled a special report in Parliament today following a comprehensive 12-month review of domestic violence policing across NSW. The report makes 44 recommendations aimed at achieving better protection and support for victims of domestic violence.

NSW Police responds to around 120 000 domestic violence calls each year. Police data shows that over 26 000 domestic violence related assaults have been recorded since October 2005, which represents about 35% of all assaults. Between 1997 and 2004, reports of domestic violence have increased by more than 50%.

‘There is an urgent need to improve the support provided to frontline police responding to domestic violence in busy urban commands and poorly resourced rural areas’, said the Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour.

‘Police are the first point of assistance for many victims of domestic violence. For their safety and protection, it is crucial to get the police response right. There are some outstanding police officers and innovative programs making measurable differences. The challenge for NSW Police is to ensure good practice is implemented across the state so that all victims receive the protection and support they need’.

Mr Barbour said it was important to acknowledge that the overwhelming volume and complexity of domestic violence makes it a difficult area of policing. **‘Frontline police need to be supported by more efficient systems and targeted use of resources. Our recommendations reflect this.’**

Mr Barbour said the extent and severity of domestic violence and its consequences required a whole of community response. **‘Police play a critical role in responding to domestic violence. The need to work effectively with other agencies is also central to an effective response. This report highlights the importance of stronger communication and cooperation between government and non-government agencies.’**

‘I believe there is considerable goodwill and momentum at present for improving the community’s response to domestic violence. My recommendations provide an opportunity to consolidate and continue the good work.’

A brief summary of facts and figures is outlined below. Copies of the Ombudsman’s report are available at www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

Facts and figures

- Police respond to approximately 120 000 domestic violence incidents each year.¹
- Between 1997 and 2004 the recorded rate of domestic assault increased by over 50%.²
- In the 12 months to 30 September 2006 there were 26 501 domestic violence related assaults – around 35% of all assaults.³
- In 2004, most (71%) victims of domestic violence were women and the majority (80%) of offenders were male.⁴
- In 2004, about one-third of victims were injured as a result of being assaulted, with 15% suffering serious injuries.⁵
- There have been 14 domestic homicides so far this year⁶ (totalling approximately 20% of all homicides).⁷
- On average there are 77 domestic homicides in Australia each year.⁸
- Compared to other women, Aboriginal women are six times more likely to experience domestic violence related assault.⁹
- Domestic violence occurs at a higher rate between October and March.¹⁰
- Of the 20 local government areas (LGAs) with the highest per capita rates of recorded domestic violence:
19 are in remote, regional or rural locations; 14 are in western NSW; and 13 incorporate police commands resourced at 'Level 3', meaning they have fewer resources and do not receive funding for Domestic Violence Liaison Officer positions.
- In 2005, police made 27 525 applications for Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders, of which 11 857 were withdrawn or dismissed. Approximately half of all ADVOs were initiated by complaint and summons. NSW Police estimates that approximately 75 000 police hours are taken up by failed attempts to serve and actual service of AVO summonses. In 2005 police returned 12% of summonses and subsequent orders to court as a result of being unable to serve them.¹¹
- 69 000 (32%) child-at-risk reports made in 2004-05 identified domestic violence as an issue of concern.¹²
- Of the 72 reviewable child deaths that took place in NSW in 2004 where the child was known to DoCS, 33 had been the subject of a risk of harm report where domestic violence was a reported issue.¹³

¹ Figure provided by NSW Police

² People, J. *Trends and Patterns in Domestic Violence Assaults*, Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research Crime and Justice Bulletin No.89, October 2005.

³ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, *NSW Recorded Crime Statistics Quarterly Update*, September 2006.

⁴ People, J. *Trends and Patterns in Domestic Violence Assaults*, Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research Crime and Justice Bulletin No.89, October 2005.

⁵ People, J. *Trends and Patterns in Domestic Violence Assaults*, Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research Crime and Justice Bulletin No.89, October 2005.

⁶ Figure provided by NSW Domestic Violence Coalition.

⁷ Based on number of homicides recorded for the same period in NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, *NSW Recorded Crime Statistics Quarterly Update*, September 2006.

⁸ Mouzos, J. and Rushforth, C., *Family Homicide in Australia*, Australian Institute of Criminology, June 2003.

⁹ Cited in Office for Women, NSW Premier's Department, *Women, Violence and Safety: Fact Sheet 4*, 2006.

¹⁰ People, J. *Trends and Patterns in Domestic Violence Assaults*, Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research Crime and Justice Bulletin No.89, October 2005.

¹¹ Data provided by NSW Police.

¹² NSW Department of Community Services, *Annual Statistical Report 2004-05*

¹³ NSW Ombudsman, *Report of Reviewable Deaths in 2004, 2005*.