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### **Redfern Legal Centre backs call to use strip searches for knife offences**

Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) supports the call by NSW Police Commissioner, Mick Fuller, that strip searches be used for possession of a weapon, but is calling for such searches to be limited to serious criminal offences.

Today in The Daily Telegraph, the NSW Police Commissioner has called on the public to support his officers in carrying out strip searches, particularly to curb potential offences with knives.

RLC's police powers solicitor Samantha Lee said "It was always parliament's intent that strip searches be used in 'serious and 'urgent' circumstances, such as weapons offences."

"This is precisely what RLC is calling for, that strip searches be limited to "serious" offences such as weapon offences and drug supply."

However, as a report commissioned by RLC and prepared by UNSW Law academics Dr Michael Grewcock and Dr Vicki Sentas, *'Rethinking Strip Searches by NSW Police'* found, knife offences accounted for less than 1.5 % of charges and in the majority of strip searches (almost 70%) nothing illegal was found. The report findings include:

- Only 30% of strip searches in the field in the 2017/18 financial year resulted in a criminal charge.
- Less than 1.5% of all charges arising from strip searches result in charges of possession/use of an unauthorised weapon (financial years 2016-2017 to 2018-2019) and less than 16.5% result in charges of drug supply.
- Almost 82% of all charges are for minor drug possession of a prohibited drug.

Recent data obtained by RLC via freedom of information laws show that over a three-year period, there were 3,919 females strip searched. Two-thirds of these strip searches (2,569) found nothing – 66 percent on average - and of the total number of strip searches, school age children (12 to 17 years) accounted for 3% of searches (122).

"A high number of strip searches find nothing illegal, which places serious doubt on whether many of these searches are necessary and justified," Ms Lee said.

"A recent public hearing conducted by the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission, revealed police are struggling to understand strip search law and officers are conducting unlawful strip searches."

Ms Lee further states, "Law reform is urgently needed to protect police from performing unlawful strip searches and to ensure that children are not subjected to these harmful and invasive procedures."

"The last thing we want for young people is that they feel too scared of police to ask for help. If anything, we want young people to feel safe enough to ask for help even from a police officer."

Click [here](#) for copy of *'Rethinking Strip Searches by NSW Police'* report.

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