**Describe the New Zealand court hierarchy.**

A hierarchy consists of a ranking of institutions according to their respective degrees of power. In relation to the courts it provides a system of appeals for unsatisfied people. The hierarchy system enables some courts to have more status on their decisions and lays the basis for the doctrine of precedent.

District Court

* general jurisdiction
* Family court
* Youth Court

**Employment Court**

**Administrative tribunals**

**Environment Court**

**High Court**

**Supreme** **Court**

**Court of Appeal**

**Disputes Tribunals**

Doctrine of precedent is referred as the use of previous case outcomes of higher authority courts. As elaborated in the diagram the hierarchy of New Zealand courts system can be classified into three levels.

The primary level consists of environment court, high court and employment court. These courts are further decentralized. The environment court has administrative tribunals and disputes tribunal. Administrative tribunal is part of judicial branch of government. Much of their work is concerned with the resolution of disputes and conflicts, however, they also grant licenses. Dispute tribunal is also referred to as small claims tribunal. This court has been established to settle claims of low value quickly, informally and inexpensively.

The high court consists of district court which is further branched into general jurisdiction. Jurisdiction of district court deals with liquidating amount claims to a certain amount, claims of equity, criminal prosecution, actions of specific status and civil cases. Family court deals with settling family matters in a peaceful and non threatening manner. Issues such as divorce, maintenance and custody, adoption, paternity, guardianship, and family disputes are some of the cases that the family court looks into. Youth court deals with youth justice issues and young offenders it tries to avoid criminal proceedings and is mostly informal. The Employment Court of New Zealand was created by the Employment Contracts Act 1991, and has continued under the Employment Relations Act 2000 in an amended form. It has a long heritage, with a New Zealand specialist industrial relations court existing in various forms since 1894.The Court exists to hear and determine cases relating to employment disputes, particularly challenges to determinations of the Employment Relations Authority, questions of interpretation of law, and has first-instance jurisdiction over matters such as strikes and lockouts.

At the next level in the hierarchy of New Zealand court system is the Court of Appeal. It deals with civil cases and criminal cases. There’s only one court of appeal, however, it has a criminal appeal division in Christchurch and Auckland. it is presided over by the president of court of appeal along side with five permanent judges and other judges who may be brought in from the ranks of high court judges if and when required. In important cases a panel of 5 judges may be used for a case.

At the Pinnacle is the Supreme Court. It was established by the Supreme Act 2003 and it is the final court of appeal in New Zealand. It reinforces New Zealand’s independency and has wider knowledge of New Zealand’s history, traditions and circumstances in relation to Treaty of Waitangi. It would improve the access to the law for New Zealanders.

**Bibliography**

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