

Indigenous women and their incarceration for minor crime

A Report for the National Council of Women of WA

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Introduction

In a recent report on Government Services it was found that Western Australia is locking up Indigenous women faster and more often than any other state in the country. This research shows that Indigenous women usually serve shorter sentences than non-Indigenous women which means that they are being imprisoned more often for minor offences.

According to research by the Australian Institute of Criminology in 2008, the three main offences Indigenous women were appearing in court for are:

- Road traffic and motor vehicle regulatory offences, 42.3 percent
- Public order offences, 15.4 percent
- Offences against justice procedures, government security and operations, 12.1 percent (AIC, 2010).

There has been a 74 percent increase in Indigenous women in incarceration in the past 15 years (Dodson, NPC, 2016). The Australian Bureau of Statistics found that the average age of Indigenous women who are imprisoned is 25-29 (ABS, 2008).

On the 13th April, 2016, Professor Pat Dodson, newly appointed Senator for WA and a long term leader of the Indigenous community, gave a significant speech on the incarceration of Indigenous people to the National Press Club (NPC). In this speech he called the issue a national disgrace, pointed to the lack of progress on this issue in the 25 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and pledged himself to use the platform of Parliament to seek new policies to deal with this issue.

This report will look into the issue of Indigenous women and their incarceration for minor crime. It will examine the ways locking Indigenous women up for minor crimes not only affects the women themselves but also their families and communities.

The growth in the imprisonment of Indigenous women

In a 2014 report on *Imprisoned Indigenous women and the shadow of colonial patriarchy*, Baldry and Cuneen found that:

- “The proportion of Indigenous women prisoners increased from 21 percent of all women prisoners in 1996 to 30 percent in 2006 and to 31 percent in 2011 (ABS, 2006, 2011, p.58).”
- “In 2012 Indigenous women comprised a staggering 34.2 percent of the female prisoner population in Australia while they represented only 2 percent of the female general population (ABS, 2012a, p. 58).”
- “Between 2011 and 2012, Indigenous Australian women’s imprisonment jumped by 20 percent compared to an increase for non-Indigenous women of 3 percent (ABS, 2012a, p.51).”

- They concluded that, “Thus the Indigenous women’s rate of imprisonment was 23 times higher than the non-Indigenous women’s rate” (Baldry & Cunneen, 2014, p. 4).

Baldry and Cunneen also commented that:

“Nearly two decades ago Cunneen and Kerley (1995, p. 88) had pointed out that the increase in Aboriginal imprisonment had impacted disproportionately on Aboriginal women. The complexity of the intersection between race and gender is shown by the fact that Indigenous women’s rate of imprisonment is now more than 50 percent higher than the non-Indigenous male rate (ABS, 2012a, p. 58). The often taken-for-granted ‘truth’ that men are more likely to be imprisoned than women is simply false when race and gender are considered simultaneously: Indigenous women are far more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous men” (Baldry & Cunneen, 2014, p. 4-5).

Bartels who conducted a report into Indigenous women’s offending patterns for the Australian Institute of Criminology found that “...Data indicates that the number of Indigenous female arrests in Western Australia almost doubled from 1,381 in 1991 to 2,744, in 2005, which is ‘mostly due to large increases in justice and good order offences and driving-related offences’ (Loh et al. 2007: 43)” (Bartels, 2012, p. 17).

Concerning Indigenous women and reimprisonment Bartels found that:

- 78 percent of all Indigenous prisoners had been previously imprisoned (ATSIJSJ 2002: 140).
- Data from New South Wales indicated that Indigenous women were more likely to have previously been imprisoned (85 percent vs 71 percent).
- 98 percent of surveyed female Indigenous prisoners had a previous conviction as an adult and over one-quarter (26 percent) had 15 or more prior convictions (Lawrie 2002).

(Bartels, 2010, p.38)

“It should also be noted that Indigenous female juveniles cautioned in 2006 in Western Australia were more likely to have multiple matters; 53 percent had only one matter, compared with 82 percent of non-indigenous juveniles. Furthermore, 13 percent had four or more cautions, compared with 3 percent of non-Indigenous juveniles, (Fernandez et al. 2009)” (Bartels, 2010, p. 39).

Definition of minor crime

Duhaime’s Law Dictionary describes a minor crime/offence as:

“A minor crime and for which the punishment is usually just a small fine or short term of imprisonment” (Duhaime, 2015).

While this report touches on the common disadvantages Indigenous women face in the prison system, it will focus mainly on minor crimes that Indigenous women

commit and how the justice and prison system deals with these through short term, repetitive sentencing.

Indigenous women and short term sentences

Criminologist Eileen Baldry commenting on an ABC News report in August 2014 said, “The female incarceration rate has doubled. The women’s incarceration rate has risen much faster than the male incarceration rate and we can see that Indigenous women account for almost all of the increase. I think it’s unconscionable” (ABC, 2014).

Most of the large increase in Indigenous women being imprisoned is due to Indigenous women being given short sentences for minor crimes. Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse (IJC) found that “...Indigenous women generally serve shorter sentences than their non-Indigenous counterparts, which suggests that they are being imprisoned for more minor offences, especially public order offences” (IJC, 2010). IJC also reported further that “The median sentence for Indigenous women was half the length of non-Indigenous women’s sentences” (IJC, 2010).

Bartels report into Indigenous women’s offending patterns found that “The median length was 26 months for Indigenous women, compared with 30 months for non-Indigenous women.... The shorter sentence length suggests that Indigenous women are being imprisoned for more trivial offences, especially public order offences (ATSISJC 2002)” (Bartels, 2010, p. 22). However, not all statistics are accurate when it comes to Indigenous women in prison and what they are in for. This is because by the time prison census comes around Indigenous women who are more likely to serve shorter sentences are back in the community meaning they are not counted in the census.

With regard to the types of crimes Indigenous women are committing to receive these short term sentences, Bartels found that “...an Indigenous woman is most likely to be arrested for disorderly conduct (19 percent arrests for Indigenous women) followed by a breach of justice order (14 percent)” (Bartels, 2010, p. 32). These are both considered minor crimes by law. “Kerley and Cunneen (1995) refer to 1990 data showing that Indigenous women compromised 78 percent of all cases where women were detained in police custody for public drunkenness (rising to 97 percent in Western Australia) and that proportionately more females than males were detained for drunkenness and good order offences compared to other offences. They described as ‘problematic’ the number of Indigenous women brought to court and imprisoned for minor offences” (Bartels, 2010, p. 36).

“Research indicates the generally petty nature of most offending. The most frequent offences committed by Indigenous women are said to be fine default, drunkenness, offensive language and social security fraud (Behrendt 2000; Brooks 1996; Corbett & Paxman 1995; Payne 1993). It is conceded that although social security fraud is not necessarily petty in its magnitude, it is often a crime of necessity and driven by

poverty” (Bartles, 2010, p. 32). Concerning Indigenous women in Western Australia “Ferrante, Fernandez and Loh (2001) found that in Western Australia, 40.5 percent of all Indigenous women entering prison in 2000 were in there for reasons of fine-default” (Bartels, 2010, p. 35). This means that Indigenous women who were unable, for whatever reason, to pay fines such as parking fines were sent to jail for what is by any standard, a minor offence.

It may appear that short sentences are to be preferred to long, but these have consequences for Indigenous women in incarceration. Such women may find themselves not being able to participate in necessary prison programs such as rehabilitation programs.

Aboriginal magistrate, Pat O’Shane, argued that the use of short term sentences was “useless” and that because of short sentencing, prison rehabilitation programs are doomed to fail: “All the education programs that might ever be available in prison are going to be pretty much worthless for this reason. I’ve actually known colleagues to send people to jail for 21 days or a month. Anything under 12 months in my view is utterly useless” (ABC, 2014).

A different way to approach rehabilitating Indigenous women who commit petty crimes may be to place them in rehab programs rather than prison. IJC has found that “91 percent of Indigenous women in prison had served prior sentences, with 48 percent having done so more than five times previously” (IJC, 2010). This tells us that prison does not teach nor reform. Rather it takes these women out of their homes and from their families for a few weeks/months before dumping them back in society. Arresting Indigenous women for minor crimes and imprisoning them for a repetitive short amounts of time does more harm than good in the long run, both to the individual and the community. While they are imprisoned their family and community will be directly affected by their absence with consequences for them and their children regarding issues such as child and elder trauma, mental health issues and loss of daily routine.

Constantly being sent back to prison for minor offences can not only affect these women and their families but their connection to the land. This is of great importance to the vast majority of Indigenous people. Indigenous information website Creative Spirits describes the importance of land to Indigenous people:

“The land owns Aboriginal people and every aspect of their lives is connected to it. They have a profound spiritual connection to land. Aboriginal law and spirituality are intertwined with the land, the people and creation, and this forms their culture and sovereignty.

The health of land and water is central to their culture. Land is their mother, is steeped in the culture, but also gives them the responsibility to care for it” (Creative Spirits, 2016).

The impact of loss of connection to the land through repeated imprisonment is an important issue as it directly affects Indigenous women’s identity and culture.

How imprisonment for petty crime affects Indigenous women

Indigenous people are already 4 to 5 times more likely to suffer from a mental illness than non-Indigenous people. However, when they are incarcerated that rate becomes even higher. Creative Spirits claims that “Up to 93 percent of Aboriginal detainees have some form of mental illness” (Creative Spirits, 2014). Amongst Aboriginal prisoners, Aboriginal women are suffering most from mental illness:

- 86 percent overall prevalence of mental disorder among women Aboriginal prisoners
- 51 percent prevalence of anxiety disorders among women
- 29 percent prevalence of depressive disorders among women
- 69 percent prevalence of substance misuse disorders among women

(The Stringer, 2014)

Further trauma Indigenous women face in incarceration is evident:

- Rates of hospital admissions for mental disorders were three times as high for Indigenous female prisoners as in the Indigenous population of Western Australia generally (SCRCSP, 2009b)
- 22 percent of Indigenous women have self-harmed in custody, compared with 13 percent of non-Indigenous women (ATSISJC, 2002)
- Between 1988 and 2002 it was found that Indigenous women were 12.6 times more likely to die after release from custody than the general NSW population. Main cause of death for women was mental and behavioural disorders (Kariminia et al. 2007)

(Bartels, 2010, p. 24)

Not only are Indigenous women disadvantaged in their everyday lives but they continue to be disadvantaged when it comes to tackling mental health issues especially in prison. Beyond this, it is cause for real concern that Aboriginal women suffering from mental health issues in remote communities may not receive any adequate help at all.

A report which was part of the Close the Gap initiative (in which many programs have failed to meet deadlines) said that “Mental health services for Aboriginal Australians are both inadequate and inappropriate” (ABC, 2014). Dr Tom Calma who is also co-chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Advisory Group said “improved mental health outcomes would have a flow-on effect to other areas, including reducing high incarceration and substance abuse rates” (ABC, 2014).

Jared Sharp from the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency also commented that Aboriginal people are “left to the criminal justice system to deal with because resources aren’t available in the community” (ABC, 2014).

Western Australia has one of the highest rates of incarceration of Aboriginal women. Approximately 50 percent of prisoners in Bandyup women’s prison are Aboriginal (Bandyup Action Group, 2014). WA Prison Officers’ Union Secretary, John Welch

commented “Given these figures, it’s no surprise that WA’s main women’s prison, Bandyup, has at times been overflowing.... Bandyup also has the highest rate of assaults of any prison in the state, so there is a clear correlation between overcrowding and violence” (Respect the Risk, 2016).

Bandyup is the only women’s prison in WA. This means that women who are of a minimum, medium and maximum security level risk are all in the same prison. In a report by the ABC in February 2016 the WA Prison Officers Union said that Bandyup was overcrowded: “The prison population has risen to around 350 prisoners this week and that’s a prison designed to really hold about 250” (ABC, 2016).

Indigenous women’s disadvantages that come with incarceration do not end when they leave prison. Although serving time in prison and then leaving is supposed to be the end of punishment, research shows that many Indigenous women still face punishment and disadvantages after prison as they are unable to find employment. The ATSIJJC found that:

“While some jurisdictions are providing employment programs in an attempt to address this issue, indigenous people remain severely disadvantaged with regards to employment if they have a criminal record” (Bartels, 2012. P. 17).

This means that Indigenous women may once again commit the petty crime that got them imprisoned in the first place. For example: An Indigenous woman is unable to provide for her family so she commits a minor theft or she is unable to pay a parking fine without it affecting the money she needs to look after her family so she doesn’t pay the fine. She is arrested and is sentenced to a short term sentence. This short term sentence means that she is unable to get the necessary help she needs through prison programs such as employment seeking programs. She leaves the prison and is unable to find herself a job because of her record or the lack of jobs causing her to have to repeat the crimes she committed the first time she was sent to prison. It is a vicious cycle and one that needs to be broken. It cannot be expected that Indigenous women will commit less crime if the support they need is not provided.

How Indigenous women’s incarceration for petty crime affects their families

Because Indigenous women are locked up for repetitive short sentences for minor crimes this means that they are constantly being taken out of their everyday lives and routine. This affects not only themselves but their families too. The effects are felt largely by their children. In a report by a Senate committee which looked into the value of a justice reinvestment approach to criminal justice in Australia, 2010 to 2013, it was found that there were many ways a parent or loved one going to prison could affect family members:

- Aboriginal children are particularly at risk of having a parent in prison with the North Australian Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Services noting that ‘up to 80 percent of Aboriginal women in prison are mothers.’

- Children with an incarcerated parent commonly experience a similar pattern of traumatic events, often witnessing their parent’s crime and arrest, losing a parent, the disruption of their family environment, and the difficulties associated with visiting their parent within the prison system.
- Ms Tammy Solonec, Director, National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, noted that Indigenous youth are “10 times more likely to be in out-of-home care, currently comprising 31 percent of all children in care.”

(APH, 2010-13)

The Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse also found that “Judges were more likely to express concern that incarceration would adversely affect children and to see a social cost to imprisonment for Indigenous women” (IJC, 2010). At the National Press Club (NPC) Pat Dodson commented on the epidemic of Indigenous incarceration and what it does to Indigenous children, “We get an insight into the ripple affect when we get a number of Indigenous children in out of home care which now numbers around 15,000 nationally” (Pat Dodson, NPC, 2016).

In its 2001 report the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (ATSISJC) noted that, “Aboriginal women remain largely invisible to policy makers and program designers with very little attention devoted to their specific situation and needs. This is of critical importance, particularly because of the impact that imprisonment has on Indigenous families and communities (especially through separation from children) (ATSISJC 2011:15)” (Bartels, 2010, p. 13).

Indigenous families are complex as they are based on a kinship system. This means that within an extended family the parents do not look after just their children. Often aunts and uncles are also considered as mum and dads and cousins are considered brothers and sisters. The Indigenous kinship system does not depend on separate roles within families. “Brooks (1996: 275) suggests that imprisonment is made more difficult for Indigenous women if their families are matri-focal, or mother-centred, and ‘removes these women from the security of a community life which, frequently, is so tightly integrated on the basis of contiguity and kinship as to be totally alien to all but those who live it’ (quoted in Bartels, 2010, p. 24).

This means that often Indigenous women are not just looking after their own children but by western thinking, maybe their nephews and nieces and partner’s grandparents too. This is especially true if family members are already in prison as their children will go live with their closest relative or second mum/dad. Indigenous people rely heavily on their family to work and help each other. Taking an Indigenous woman and mum away from her family for seemingly two short weeks can mean the breakdown of the family structure. In this regard, the 2002 ATSISJC report found that: “The consequences to the community of the removal of Indigenous women are significant and potentially expose children to risk of neglect, abuse, hunger and homelessness. Indigenous women also serve comparatively shorter sentences, suggesting a general failure to employ the principle of imprisonment as a last resort.

Once imprisoned, recidivism statistics also indicate that Indigenous women are at greater risk of returning to goal. (ATSISJC 2002)” (Bartels, 2010, p. 13).

Indigenous women and mothers can also be sent far away from their families when going to prison. Bandyup prison which is the only women’s prison in Western Australia is only 30 minutes from Perth city which is not far away for city residents. However, if you live in a remote part of Western Australia or even at the end of the Joondalup train line in Butler, the distance becomes much longer for children who are trying to visit their mothers in incarceration. “As noted by the SCRCSP, because there are fewer prisons for women, Indigenous females are often detained in centres far from their children and communities (SCRCSP 2009b)” (Bartels, 2009, p. 24).

How Indigenous women’s incarceration for petty crime affects their communities

An inquiry conducted by the Senate committee from 2010 to 2013 looked into the effects Indigenous women’s incarceration had on their communities:

- “The committee heard that Indigenous prisoners are affected profoundly with the breakdown of links with family members and communities. Indigenous communities are also affected as every individual has a role to play including financial and social. If an individual or group of individuals is removed, the community is heavily burdened, weakening the community and exacerbating economic distress creating prime conditions for further offending behaviour”.
- “The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and international research have emphasised the devastating impact that a disconnect with country and culture caused by incarceration has on the identity and well-being of Indigenous people”.

(APH, 2010-13)

The HoPE (Health of Prisoner Evaluation) Pilot Project found that “A person’s connectedness to his or her community and neighbourhood serves as a protective factor against recidivism (Wooldredge & Thistlethwaite, 2002). However, this HoPE research indicates that Indigenous people are more likely to be transient and/or live in unstable accommodation, which decreases the likelihood of building connections and maintaining relationships with the neighbourhood” (Kraemer, Gately & Kessell, 2009).

In an evaluation of family visits while in incarceration, HoPE also found that “Nearly half (47.6percent) of the Indigenous females received no visits in the past four weeks, and for 85 percent of these respondents, this was normal. Common reasons for this were that family or friends lived too far away to visit” (Kraemer, Gately & Kessell, 2009).

Why are Indigenous women committing these petty crimes?

It is a dismal reality that the disadvantages the Indigenous people of Western Australia and more broadly Australia suffer including high rates of incarceration and mental illness, can be linked back to the trauma and the aftermath of white settlement. Years and years of the institutionalised idea that the Indigenous people of Australia are inferior have helped to lead to this epidemic of disadvantage. Their culture, life, children, families and land have been taken away from them and even today Indigenous people are still feeling the heart ache of those tragic lost years. Kevin Rudd's "Sorry" speech was a step in the right direction, however the impact of those words is growing weaker as the federal and state governments fail to find policies that work to turn back the disadvantage faced by Indigenous people.

In saying this, Indigenous women have to have some responsibility for their situation. Pat Dodson said "We will not be liberated from the tyranny of the criminal justice system unless we also acknowledge the problems in our own communities and take responsibility for the hurt we inflict and cause on each other- family violence, substance abuse and neglect of children should not be tolerated as the norm" (Dodson, NPC, 2016).

Pat Dodson went on: "A range of factors contribute to offending by Indigenous women but poverty, homelessness, and high rates of violence and sexual abuse against women along with drugs and alcohol abuse link to the trauma they experience and tend to bring Indigenous women into contact with the criminal justice system at an increasingly high rate and often leading to the trivial and minor offences. Sadly, what this suggests is that Indigenous women ending up in prison are more likely to have been victims themselves" (Dodson, NPC, 2016).

Conclusion

Over the past couple of decades, a good deal of research on Indigenous women and their incarceration for minor crime has been carried out and its main findings have been summarised in this report. The problems are now clear: The rates of incarceration, mental illness and disadvantage are all growing rapidly and current policing, justice and prison policies have largely failed. What follows here are ideas for moving forward on these issues proposed by the experts in this field.

"The 2002 ATSIJSJ (2002: 136) report suggests that:

It is beginning to be accepted that while much offending behaviour is linked to social marginalisation and economic disadvantage, the impact of non-economic deprivation, such as damage to identity and culture, as well as trauma and grief, have a significant relationship to offending behaviour" (Bartels, 2010, p. 42).

A later 2006 ATSIJSJ report also points out that:

"Links must be drawn and holistic models developed and supported which address the connections between culture, drug use, alcohol use, separation from family, violence, poverty, spiritual needs, housing, health, boredom, race discrimination and gender discrimination'. Furthermore, there remains a key need for determining the views and

ideas of Indigenous women themselves on their criminal justice needs and especially their post-release needs (quoted in Baldry & McCausland 2009).”

On April 8th 2016 The Sydney Morning Herald reported that the Australian Bar Association (ABA) had “called on state and territory governments to scrap or amend mandatory sentencing laws for crimes including minor assaults, driving offences and petty theft” (SMH, 2016). The report noted that “The laws, which differ significantly between jurisdictions, are partly to blame for the disproportionately high rate of incarceration of Indigenous Australians” (SMH, 2016).

Senior Barrister, Patrick O’Sullivan commented:

“The re-imprisonment rate for Aboriginal children is higher than the retention rate of school. It’s just a national disgrace and we’ve got to do something about it.”

The report went on to say, “Mr O’Sullivan said scrapping mandatory sentencing for some offences was not a “panacea” but would address part of a complex problem. The proposal was “cost-neutral” and budget savings from reducing prisoner numbers could be reinvested in programs to rehabilitate offenders and reduce recidivism” (SMH, 2016).

Pat Dodson at the National Press Club on the 13th of April 2016 is worth quoting at length:

“If we are to disrupt the trends we must invest in rebuilding capacity of families and communities to deal with the social problems that contribute to the appalling indicators. We need to prioritise and ensure frontline services that are not only resourced to respond to crisis but can develop preventative programs that engage the community in winding back the ravages of drug and alcohol abuse, the scourge of family violence and welfare dependency. For the vast bulk of our people the legal system is not a trusted instrument of justice. It is a feared and despised processing plant that propels the most vulnerable and disabled of our people towards a broken and bleak future. Surely as a nation we are better than this” (Dodson, NPC, 2016).

“We need a smarter form of justice that takes us beyond a narrowed eyed focus on punishment and penalties. To look more broadly at a vision of justice as a coherent and integrated whole not as a closed system but as an integrated life process that allows some sense of healing and rehabilitation” (Dodson, NPC, 2016).

“If we are serious about addressing these issues we must work together and agree the road forward but these policies must engage Indigenous peoples in a genuine dialogue and that dialogue must translate into real partnerships that enable local communities to devise solutions to the problems that confront them. Benchmarks and strategies to achieve them must be set with agreement of the communities with sufficient flexibility to allow for regional variations. As we know a “one size fits all” approach simply will not be effective. It also requires investment in communities not die on the vine policies that lead to community closure by stealth and place more of our people at risk on coming into contact with the criminal justice system. The

Australian parliament needs to be more open to the idea of engaging in a formal way with Indigenous peoples on matters that affect our social, cultural, economic interests as well as our political status within the nation state” (Dodson, NPC, 2016).

Beyond these expert recommendations, there are some other avenues that could be explored:

1. There needs to be more research into women who commit petty crimes and their experience within the criminal justice system. Researchers in this area refer to a lack of information on Indigenous women within the criminal justice system, especially at a state level.
2. There need to be alternative ways established to deal with women who have committed minor crimes. Alternative punishments mean breaking the vicious cycle so that imprisonment becomes a last resort. Alternative measures such as:
 - Rehabilitation through weekly programs
 - Community service
 - Diversion programs
 - Halfway houses
 - Re-entry programs
 - Circle court/sentencing. Circle sentencing is a court process made for Indigenous people. It relies on talking amongst the victim, offender and Aboriginal elders and understanding why the offender committed the crime. Aboriginal elders known by the offender are used to help the offender understand the consequences of their actions and hand down an appropriate sentence with the help from a prosecutor and the victim. A circle court was made available in Kalgoorlie WA, but was shut down after it was abused by taking on more major crimes which should be handled by courts. It has been proven to be very successful in Eastern states as Indigenous people feel that their voice can be heard and that the circle court had respect for them and their culture.
 - We also need to look at the criminal justice system and the impact of mandatory sentencing
3. We need to reform the context of Indigenous women’s lives. As mentioned, the reason why minor crime occurs is often because of the disadvantages Indigenous women face such as poverty and unemployment. These disadvantages are made worse by racial discrimination going back to white settlement. It is necessary to deal with such issues to reform the context of Indigenous disadvantage.
4. We need to educate future generations. This means not hiding away the bad things in our past and whitewashing our history. We need to teach future generations what happened when the white settlers came and how this then affects Indigenous people today. We need to shut down stereotypes and racism

that Indigenous people face. We need to respect and understand them. Most of all we need to listen to Indigenous people and involve them in the process of reconciliation much more than we do now.

5. The problems of Indigenous women's incarceration in Western Australia are perhaps more acute than in any other state in Australia. This means that WA governments need to focus more on this issue. They need to do more research on its causes, on policing, on the justice system and on the problems of the Baldry prison which are getting worse, New methods of prevention and rehabilitation are essential in WA.
6. For these issues to be solved there needs to be consistent help, funding, education and research provided for Indigenous women battling disadvantages within not only the prison system but the community and Australia as a whole. Both Federal and State governments need to be consistent in providing these things despite elections and changing party leaders. Playing politics and constant changing attitudes in regard to helping Indigenous women and people only puts them further behind non-Indigenous women and other people. Help, funding, education and research needs to be ongoing and consistent until we close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and other people once and for all.

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