

## PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN THROUGH PROGRAMS WHICH TARGET MEN

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### I INTRODUCTION

The extent of interpersonal crime in Indigenous communities, and of violence in particular, is relatively well documented. National data on homicide rates shows that Indigenous people are 8.1 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be victims of homicide.<sup>1</sup> Violence as a cause of hospitalisation for young people between the ages of 15 and 24 is 2.7 times higher for Indigenous males than for non-Indigenous males, and 15 times higher for Indigenous women than for non-Indigenous women.<sup>2</sup>

An analysis of police reports in Western Australia has revealed that Aboriginal women are 10.7 times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be victims of violent crime.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the reports indicated extraordinarily high rates of victimisation for Aboriginal women in the 20–24 year age group. One in 10 Aboriginal women in this age group reported that a violent offence had been committed against her during a 12 month period.<sup>4</sup>

It is particularly alarming that much of this crime is attributable to family violence. Aboriginal women are 45 times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be victims of domestic violence.<sup>5</sup> In Western Australia, data on Aboriginal communities shows that 39.5 per cent of serious assaults are spousal assaults, compared to 7.5 per cent in non-Aboriginal communities.<sup>6</sup> The incidence of violence directed at family members is also higher, accounting for 17.2 per cent of serious assaults in Aboriginal communities compared with 4.4 per cent in non-Aboriginal communities.<sup>7</sup>

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1 Jenny Mouzos, *Homicidal Encounters: A Study of Homicide in Australia 1989–1999*, Research and Public Policy Series No 28, Australian Institute of Criminology (2000).

2 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Young People: Their Health and Wellbeing 1999* (1999) 210.

3 Richard Harding et al, *Aboriginal Contact with the Criminal Justice System and the Impact of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1995) 22.

4 *Ibid* 23.

5 Anna Ferrante et al, *Measuring the Extent of Domestic Violence* (1996) 34.

6 Harding et al, above n 3, 26.

7 *Ibid*.

Perhaps the most disturbing figures are those that relate to homicide. A study of homicide and Indigenous women between 1989 and 1998 showed that the rate of homicide for Indigenous women was 11.7 per 100 000 compared to 1.1 per 100 000 for non-Indigenous women.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Indigenous women were more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than non-Indigenous women were, with such homicides accounting for 75 per cent of homicides involving Indigenous women victims, compared with 54 per cent of homicides involving non-Indigenous women victims.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, only 1.5 per cent of the Indigenous women victims were killed by strangers compared with 17.2 per cent of non-Indigenous women victims in the same period.<sup>10</sup> During the nine year period, approximately 95 per cent of the Indigenous victims of femicide were killed by Indigenous men.<sup>11</sup>

From these figures, several key issues emerge. Firstly, it is apparent that violence in Aboriginal communities is a severe problem. Secondly, the victims of violence are usually women and young people. Thirdly, the perpetrators of violence are usually men. The preferred term for such violence in Aboriginal communities is 'family violence'.<sup>12</sup> A clear policy implication arises from these issues. How should we deal with men (of varying ages) who use violence against their partners, other members of their extended family and the community?

The purpose of this article is to discuss crime prevention programs which focus on Indigenous men (including young men and boys), emphasising the right of Indigenous self-determination in developing and implementing these programs. It is important to take a broad look at what might constitute crime prevention without confining the concept to programs defined as 'crime prevention' by government agencies. Such a broad view recognises the contribution made by many community organisations, agencies and programs, although their core activity may not be crime prevention.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly important in relation to Indigenous people because many of the community programs have arisen from grassroots concern with the need to develop measures to deal with crime and offending behaviour in the face of the apparent failure of mainstream justice mechanisms. Many of the local initiatives have also developed within a framework of increasing demands for Indigenous self-determination.

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8 Jenny Mouzos, 'New Statistics Highlight High Homicide Rate for Indigenous Women' (1999) 4(25) *Indigenous Law Bulletin* 16, 16.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, *Indigenous Solutions: The National Indigenous Family Violence Grants Program* (2001) <<http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/oswpdf/indigbooklet.pdf>> at 11 June 2002.

13 Lawrence Sherman, *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising* (1997) US National Institute of Justice <<http://www.preventingcrime.org/report/index.htm>> at 28 May 2002.

## II INDIGENOUS CRIME PREVENTION

In the last decade there has been an enormous regeneration of community initiatives to deal with issues facing Indigenous people. A recent report on violence in Australian Indigenous communities identified 130 anti-violence programs that had been implemented, were being implemented, or were planned for implementation in Indigenous communities.<sup>14</sup> In many respects, these programs are practical demonstrations of the potential success of Indigenous self-determination. The failure of existing crime control methods to operate effectively in Indigenous communities, and the over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system, provide important and powerful bases for advocating greater Indigenous control over crime control policy.

In addition, there is a fundamental human rights claim that Indigenous people have the *right* to exercise authority in areas of law and justice. Such a claim obviously has an impact on the development and operation of appropriate crime prevention programs.

The concept of crime prevention can be understood as involving a preventive approach to crime which can be distinguished from law enforcement and criminal justice approaches. Governments tend to use the term 'crime prevention' for their promotion of multi-agency, situational, and social strategies as well as 'partnerships' against crime.<sup>15</sup> Crime prevention emphasises that crime reduction can be achieved separately from both punishment and law enforcement. Indeed, crime prevention can be considered as a separate objective from the punishment of offenders.

Indigenous crime prevention strategies currently incorporate many different approaches. These approaches include: situational crime prevention, such as night patrols; social crime prevention, such as cultural and other programs for 'at risk' youth; community-based prevention, such as law and justice groups in the Northern Territory and Queensland; and tertiary crime prevention, such as Koori and Nunga courts in Victoria and South Australia.

Literature on Indigenous crime prevention identifies the need for such diverse strategies.<sup>16</sup> Yet if we are serious about community development, community ownership and Indigenous self-determination, it may not be possible for non-Indigenous Australians to be prescriptive about the definitive components of an effective crime prevention program. However, there are programs which appear to be particularly effective. This may result from the principles on which they are based rather than the content of the programs per se. A recent report identified the key characteristics shared by Indigenous programs that seek to effectively address crime prevention issues. Firstly, they embrace a holistic approach which incorporates different strategies. Secondly, significant others, such as family members and community Elders, are involved. Thirdly, they are

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14 Paul Memmott et al, *Violence in Indigenous Communities: Full Report* (2001) 3, The National Crime Prevention Programme <<http://www.ncp.gov.au/ncp/Publications/PDF/violenceindigenous.pdf>> at 11 June 2002.

15 Gordon Hughes, *Understanding Crime Prevention: Social Control, Risk and Late Modernity* (1998) 3.

16 See, eg, Chris Cunneen, *Crime Prevention in Aboriginal Communities* (2002).

guided by the principle of self-determination. Fourthly, they are comprised of culturally appropriate program content and staff.<sup>17</sup>

These points are essentially a distillation of a much broader literature on 'best practice' in Indigenous communities. In particular, this literature covers program development in drug and alcohol services,<sup>18</sup> family violence programs,<sup>19</sup> and diversionary strategies for Indigenous young people<sup>20</sup> and adults.<sup>21</sup> What makes crime prevention programs successful across these diverse areas is a fundamental commitment to self-determination and community development and ownership.

### III ABORIGINAL FAMILY VIOLENCE: PROGRAMS FOR OFFENDERS

Harry Blagg has provided a useful summary of some of the key issues that have emerged with anti-violence programs for Indigenous men.<sup>22</sup> His research shows the development of a distinctively Indigenous approach to the issue, exemplified in:

- projects aimed at inter-generational issues such as father–son relationships and the mentoring of Aboriginal youth by Elder figures;
- projects aimed at supporting young Aboriginal fathers;
- the creation of men's 'meeting places';
- establishing domestic and family violence outreach services targeted at men;
- organising men's healing camps and/or healing journeys; and
- formulating local violence prevention strategies aimed at Indigenous youth.<sup>23</sup>

Currently there are a number of crime prevention programs which are aimed primarily at Indigenous men. These include community-focused programs for both offenders and non-offenders, and programs which specifically target men

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17 Ibid.

18 Dennis Gray et al, 'What Works? A Review of Evaluated Alcohol Misuse Interventions Among Aboriginal Australians' (2000) 95 *Addiction* 11.

19 Memmott et al, above n 14; Harry Blagg, *Crisis Intervention in Aboriginal Family Violence: Summary Report* (2000); Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, *Key Findings: Projects With Indigenous Communities* (2000) <<http://www.padv.dpvc.gov.au/oswpdf/KEY1fin.pdf>> at 11 June 2002.

20 Chris Cunneen and David McDonald, 'Diversion and Best Practice for Indigenous People: A Non-Indigenous Perspective' (Paper presented at the Best Practice Interventions in Corrections for Indigenous People Conference, Australian Institute of Criminology, Adelaide, 13–15 October 1999), Australian Institute of Criminology <<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/indigenous/cunneen.pdf>> at 11 June 2002; Urbis Keys Young, *Evaluation of ATSIC Young Offenders Diversionary Programs* (1999); Urbis Keys Young, *Aboriginal Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Good Practice Project: Final Report* (2001).

21 Chris Cunneen, 'Residential Alternatives for Indigenous Offenders' (Paper presented at the Best Practice Interventions in Corrections for Indigenous People Conference, Australian Institute of Criminology, Adelaide, 8–9 October 2001), Australian Institute of Criminology <<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/indigenous2/cunneen.pdf>> at 11 June 2002.

22 Harry Blagg, *Pilot Counselling Programs for Mandated and Non-Mandated Indigenous Men: Research and Program Development. Full Report* (2001).

23 Ibid 4.

who have been convicted of committing offences of violence. Some programs relate to changing (male) community attitudes towards violence, while others specifically focus on individuals. Finally, some programs are delivered through Indigenous community-based organisations, while others are delivered through government agencies and may be used in institutional settings like prison.

### A Programs Through Community-Based Organisations

A number of programs have been developed which build upon community organisations in innovative ways. The federal government's 'Partnerships Against Violence' initiative has been funding a range of different types of programs to counteract violence. Some of these programs are based in Indigenous organisations and are aimed at men.

One such program is the 'Respect Project' run by the Gudu Wondjer Aboriginal Corporation in Eden, New South Wales. The project aims to encourage men to find solutions to family violence by running workshops and camps to raise awareness and promote healing. A mentor program helps link males to resources in the community and to encourage active participation in the development of programs to reduce family violence. A local Elder has been employed part-time to hold a series of talks and consultations with Aboriginal men, to provide educational workshops and run camps which focus on family violence issues, and to involve men in finding solutions.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, the Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation in Western Australia has received assistance through the 'Partnerships Against Violence' initiative. It has been funded to provide counselling for a small group of men, and to train them in family counselling techniques so that they can share their experiences with male kin and Yorgum clients. The project will use a multi-model psychotherapy approach to healing and counselling. The men will use the skills and knowledge developed in the program to talk to and support their extended family (particularly other men), as well as self-referred or mandated perpetrators. Their experiences of the healing group will be documented in a healing journal.<sup>25</sup>

In Queensland, the Cairns and District Regional Indigenous Men's Group aims to assist men to accept their roles and responsibilities through spiritual and holistic healing, and by learning life management skills embracing education, employment and health. The project is aimed at pre- and post-release perpetrators of family violence.<sup>26</sup> Another Queensland project, the Young Father's Support Group, has been operating since March 1999. It provides assistance for young Indigenous fathers to aid them in supporting their partners and to be a positive role model for their children and communities. The target group is 16–25 year olds. The objectives of the program include educating young fathers about the physical, emotional, spiritual and cultural needs of children and providing an understanding of the need for bonding, and of the parenting role.<sup>27</sup>

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24 Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, above n 12, 9.

25 Ibid 30.

26 Ibid 5.

27 Thomas Jia, *Indigenous Young Father's Support Group* (undated) (copy on file with author).

The use of popular local sporting teams has provided an innovative approach to reducing the level of male violence. The Wadja Warriors are the local football team for the Woorabinda community in Queensland. At the start of the football season players were told they would be dropped from the team if they committed any acts of violence against women. The policy was enforced and two players were suspended in the first season. Other initiatives associated with the Wadja Warriors include education and awareness programs, an out-station for families experiencing problems, and the establishment of men's groups. Evidence suggests a drop in domestic violence in Woorabinda. Breaches of domestic violence orders fell by two thirds in 2000, indicating a major reduction in violence against women and children.<sup>28</sup> The team has been credited with this outcome because of the positive role model it provides.<sup>29</sup>

These examples show that community-based programs can operate successfully. Indeed, their strengths lie in being able to analyse and respond to issues at a local level, and in being able to develop programs that resonate with local conditions.

## B Court-Mandated and Court-Referred Programs for Offenders

Other programs have provided alternative approaches to dealing with offenders within the criminal justice system. The Northern Territory court-mandated 'Domestic Violence Offender Program' was a pilot project developed by the Northern Territory Office of Women's Policy and implemented by Northern Territory Correctional Services. The program began from the premise that offenders are unlikely to self-refer. Hence, an offender's consent was not required prior to the making of an offender program order. However, offenders could also be referred via Community Corrections, the Parole Board or the Prison Classification Committee.<sup>30</sup>

Operating over several years from the late 1990s, the program was directed at both Indigenous and non-Indigenous men in the Northern Territory. However, the guide for the program contained specific program development and delivery information for Indigenous people. Based on a behaviour change model and conducted over 26 weeks, the program reinforced the criminal nature of the violence to the offender and the community and enforced the attendance of

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28 Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, *Yaldilda: Standing Strong, Preventing Crime in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities* (2001) 39 <<http://www.indigenous.qld.gov.au/pdf/yaldch/yaldintr.pdf>> at 11 June 2002.

29 Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development ('DATSIPD'), *The Next Step: Queensland Government Response to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report* (2000) 13–14 <<http://www.qldwoman.qld.gov.au/publications/Nextstep.pdf>> at 11 June 2002.

30 Ian Castillon and Chris Manners, 'Northern Territory Court-Mandated Pilot Program for Offenders of Domestic Violence and Aboriginal Family Violence' (Paper presented at the Best Practice Interventions in Corrections for Indigenous People Conference, Australian Institute of Criminology, Adelaide, 13–15 October 1999) 3, Australian Institute of Criminology <<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/indigenous/castillo.pdf>> at 11 June 2002.

offenders. Offenders were exposed to different attitudes and ways of behaving. The program also offered support to survivors and child witnesses.

Key findings from preliminary research are instructive. Firstly, a structured program should be delivered to groups within an empowering and innovative learning framework that combines cognitive, behavioural and resocialisation approaches. Indeed, programs for offenders should not be based on models of support or therapy, but must have results that focus on complete behavioural and attitudinal changes in the offenders. Secondly, program topics for Indigenous offenders need to be culturally sensitive. In the Northern Territory program, topics were developed to include information on the cultural context of Indigenous family violence, motivation for change relevant to Indigenous offenders and an exploration of Aboriginal spiritual healing. Programs should also have the flexibility to be undertaken in a range of settings for Indigenous groups and be facilitated by Elders within Indigenous communities. Thirdly, education sessions should be included for offenders on the problems of excessive alcohol consumption. Finally, offering support to children exposed to domestic violence is a crucial component of such a program, as it was in the Northern Territory.<sup>31</sup>

The Northern Territory program ceased in 2000 due to lack of funding.

In a similar approach, the Department of Corrective Services in Queensland has developed the 'Ending Family Violence Program'. This provides a culturally appropriate program for the prevention of family violence with a therapeutic focus for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders who are already in custody.<sup>32</sup>

Court-mandated programs for Indigenous offenders can work successfully if they are sufficiently connected to Indigenous communities and the program development and delivery is supervised by Indigenous people. The premature end of the Northern Territory program also shows the need for adequate and ongoing commitments to funding by government.

### **C Working with Indigenous Young People to Prevent Family and Domestic Violence**

Working with young Indigenous people is perhaps the most important means of ensuring that attitudes towards family violence are changed in the long run. Indigenous children and adolescents are at great risk of becoming involved in violence, alcohol use, sexual activity, sexual violence and crime at an early age. There are few violence prevention programs designed specifically for Indigenous young people.

The National Crime Prevention Office has prepared a report that focuses on working with Indigenous adolescents to prevent family violence.<sup>33</sup> The report

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31 Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, above n 19, 4; Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, *Key Findings: Working With Men* (2000) 2–3 <<http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/oswpdf/keyfind3.pdf>> at 11 June 2002.

32 DATSIPD, above n 29, 6.

33 Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, *Working with Adolescents to Prevent Domestic Violence: Indigenous Rural Model*, National Crime Prevention Report No 8 (2000).

notes that it is important to work with an Indigenous definition of family violence which can encapsulate a diverse range of reciprocal ties of obligation and mutual support. Furthermore, the report makes a number of recommendations. It argues that strategies need to be responsive to a number of factors – including the uneven spread of human and capital infrastructure in rural and remote areas, the large number of vulnerable youth and their families in Indigenous communities, and the stresses placed on Indigenous youth – as they attempt to balance traditional practices with non-Indigenous values and institutions. The report also notes that it is difficult to transport projects designed for non-Indigenous communities to Indigenous communities as they often fail to mobilise Indigenous people. Indeed, there is evidence that projects work best when Indigenous people run them. Models of intervention should be flexible enough to accommodate vastly differing regional and cultural contexts. Significant local variations in Indigenous culture need to be incorporated into specific action plans. Finally, the specific dynamics of Indigenous family and kinship structures need to have a central place in any strategy focused on Indigenous youth. This includes recognising the influence of networks of ‘significant others’ (not just parents) on aspects of child socialisation.<sup>34</sup>

Anti-violence programs which work with children and young people need to be expanded. We know the long-term and inter-generational effects on family and community life of past policies of separation that have created the Stolen Generations. Working with young people provides the opportunity to short-circuit the reproduction of harmful behaviours related to family violence, and may have a positive effect on reducing contact with welfare and juvenile justice agencies.

#### IV CONCLUSION

There are an increasing number of programs across Australia aimed at changing the violent behaviour exhibited by some Indigenous men. It is clear that these projects are developing new approaches and models derived from and strengthening Indigenous family life and culture. These programs move beyond seeing Indigenous men simply as perpetrators. They seek to overcome the long-term effects of colonisation and marginalisation, as well as changing immediate behaviour. However, we also need to recognise that these programs are still very much in their infancy. As Blagg writes ‘few are sufficiently established for clear lessons to be learned about program delivery and, particularly, outcomes. This makes it difficult to be prescriptive about ‘good practice’ models, let alone make claims about ‘what works’.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, the recognition of what is happening with anti-violence programs in Aboriginal communities is important for at least three reasons. Firstly, while violence in Aboriginal communities is a severe problem, it is not a

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34 Ibid.

35 Blagg, above n 22, 4.



hopeless problem, nor is it one that is being ignored by the communities themselves. Secondly, programs are being developed in specific Indigenous contexts. This is preferable and far more likely to succeed than a government-imposed 'one size fits all' approach to policy and program implementation. Finally, contrary to recent tendencies to paint self-determination as a failed policy, the real exercise of self-determination at local levels has been an important and necessary part of the success of programs against violence.