



Social and Cultural Resilience and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Mothers in Prison Newsletter

Newsletter 3

December 2013

Editorial

Welcome to the third Social and Cultural Resilience and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Mothers in Prison newsletter.

We are now in the data analysis phase of the research in both hubs so it's a good time to run through our updates both nationally and hub-specific. The research team has a number of outcomes to report since our last Newsletter.

Team Update

The research team held its third annual Investigators' meeting in October. The annual meeting consisted of workshops over two days. We were honoured to have Professor Maggie Walter from the University of Tasmania present a workshop on Indigenous Quantitative Methodologies. Maggie is an expert in Indigenous Statistics, Mixed Methods Research, and Indigenous Research Methodologies. We would like to again thank Maggie for facilitating such an interesting and informative discussion!

The team is happy to announce that we have updated our webpage on [HealthInfoNet](#). The webpage contains information about the research project including links to current and past newsletters, abstracts and publications. We have also updated the project's web pages on [NPESU](#) (NSW hub) and [NDRI](#) (WA hub) – access to these links can be found on the [HealthInfoNet](#) webpage as well as clicking on the hyperlinks.

NSW Update

The NSW hub hosted its second annual NSW Advisory Group meeting on 17 October 2013 at Tranby Aboriginal College in Glebe. The meeting was a great success and the research team learnt a lot from the day. The meeting was attended by members representing government and non-government organisations, Aboriginal-specific services in the Metropolitan Sydney area and community members. The focus of this meeting was to discuss issues impacting on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal women and mothers in contact with the criminal justice system in NSW. This was an interactive process with the discussion led by members of the Advisory Group. The

discussion gave the research team the opportunity to hear from the community about what they see as the key issues and priorities for the data analysis phase of the project. One of the main outcomes of the meeting is that we will be writing papers (with feedback from the Advisory Group along the way) about the importance of listening to the community for producing meaningful research outputs.

The data collection phase commenced in the prisons in March. Members of the research team, Juanita Sherwood and Sacha Kendall, conducted interviews with Aboriginal women and mothers at correctional centres across NSW. In Sydney, these included: Silverwater, Emu Plains, and Dillwynia; and in regional NSW: Broken Hill, Wellington and Mid North Coast (Kempsey). Staff members from both Corrective Services and Justice Health NSW also participated in interviews at each of these sites.

Across these six correctional centres, 97 social and emotional well-being questionnaires with Aboriginal women and 50 in-depth interviews with Aboriginal mums were completed. A total of 42 interviews with Corrective Services NSW and Justice Health NSW staff in each of the regions were also completed. With Aboriginal women and mothers in custody being so generous in sharing their stories, and with the enthusiastic participation of staff members in these regions, we were able to complete data collection in October.

The research project and team members were well received at each of the prisons. We would like to extend our gratitude to the women participating in the research for giving their time and sharing their stories. Their contributions have been invaluable to the research. We would also like to thank the Aboriginal Inmate Delegates at the prisons who assisted the research process by engaging with other women and letting them know about the project. Also, we would like to thank the staff at each of the correctional centres for sharing their experiences. Additionally, we would like to thank the Nursing Unit Managers (NUMs) from Justice Health and the Managers of Service and Programs (MOSPs) from Corrective Services who were actively involved in supporting the success of the research in the prisons. Corrective Services personnel were vital to the engagement of the research team and assisted with connecting the researchers with participants as well as providing logistical support for access and engagement – both with the women and with staff.

The preliminary data analysis commenced in November. We will be looking to our Advisory Group for input on how best to interpret the data and disseminate the research findings to ensure that policymakers, government agencies and community members are informed on the issues impacting on Aboriginal women and mothers in prison and their families and that the project has maximum impact.

The team also had excellent opportunities for dissemination in 2013. Juanita Sherwood delivered a number of presentations relating to the research project including two keynote addresses: “Intergenerational Trauma” at the *Justice Health Annual Psychology Conference* and “Education in prison for Aboriginal peoples” at the *ACEA International Conference*. Additionally, Juanita was a panel member at the *Sydney University Criminology Series’ “The University beyond walls: Transformative prison education from inside out”*.

Sacha Kendall presented on the Social and Cultural Resilience and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Mothers in Prison project at the Hunter New England Local Health District and Justice & Forensic Mental Health Network's *Pregnant Aboriginal Women in Custody* Forum in May and at the UNSW School of Public Health & Community Medicine's Annual Research Symposium: *Dreaming up the Future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Public Health* in October.

WA Update

Since the previous newsletter, the WA-end has completed fieldwork in the prisons. The researchers visited five prisons including three regional sites and the two metropolitan centres that hold women. All up 88 interviews were conducted with incarcerated Aboriginal mothers across the state: Regional: Eastern Goldfields (8 interviews), Greenough (15 interviews), West Kimberley (15 interviews); and Metropolitan: Bandyup (36 interviews), and Boronia (14 interviews).

Our sample represented approximately 41% of the total Aboriginal female prisoner population in Western Australia and around 49% of all *eligible* women (based on figures suggesting that approximately 85% of Aboriginal women in prison are mothers). We interviewed a diverse range of women including: Mothers with biological children and/or those who had reared up non-biological children; out-of country women; pregnant women; women with their child/ren residing with them in prison; women who had previously had child/ren residing with them in prison; women who had applied to have their child/ren reside with them in prison; grandmothers; remand and sentenced prisoners; and, those for whom it was their first time in prison through to women who had been incarcerated 10+ times. Interviews took between one hour and 2.5 hours.

We wish to thank all our contacts at various prisons for facilitating the process and special thanks go to the women who so generously shared their stories. Interviews with prison officers and health services staff are on-going and interviews with key stakeholders have commenced; it is expected that all data collection will be completed by the end of 2013. Preliminary analysis of the data has commenced.

WA's reference groups will meet in early December for the last time for 2013. The meeting will once again bring together service providers, stakeholders, consumers, academics and health professionals to examine the issues the data have raised and to explore options for future dissemination of findings.

In other news, Mandy Wilson travelled to Cairns for the National Indigenous Health Conference on the 25-27th November where she presented two papers on the project.

Thank you...

The research team gratefully acknowledges the participation of Aboriginal women and mothers in custody. These women contribute greatly to the research through sharing their personal stories and experiences with us.

Our sincerest of thanks to the many women participating in the research, the staff who generously provide support and assistance, our stakeholders and our Advisory Groups.