

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a snapshot, 2006

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

This snapshot presents an overview of Indigenous peoples' experiences of law and justice as reported in the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) as well as data from other relevant ABS collections. Unless otherwise specified, data relate to Indigenous people aged 15 years and over.

DATA SOURCES

This article presents information from the 2002 NATSISS and some data from the 2006 National Prisoner's Census. Some comparable data for non-Indigenous people from the 2002 General Social Survey (GSS) are also presented, as well as selected results from the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS).

INQUIRIES

For further information contact the Assistant Director, National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics in Canberra on (02) 6252 6301 or visit www.abs.gov.au

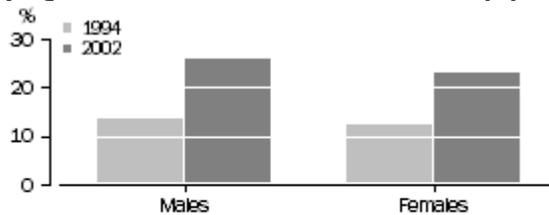
EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

The relative socioeconomic disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is reflected in considerably high rates of victimisation (footnote 1). Victims of violence may suffer serious injury, disability or death and, together with those who witness violence, are more likely to experience debilitating stress and trauma (ABS & AIHW 2005). Similarly, people who perceive their neighbourhood as unsafe may be discouraged from accessing local services and recreational facilities, and from creating social networks close to their homes.

VICTIMS OF PHYSICAL OR THREATENED VIOLENCE

- In 2002, about one-quarter (24%) of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over reported being a victim of physical or threatened violence in the 12 months prior to the survey (26% of males and 23% of females), nearly double the overall rate reported in 1994 (13%) (ABS 2004).

Victim of physical or threatened violence(a) - 1994, 2002



(a) Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over

Source: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey 1994
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002

- The Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and South Australia all reported victimisation rates at or above 30% (ABS 2004).
- One-third (33%) of young Indigenous people (aged 15-24 years) were a victim of violence in 2002 (ABS 2004).
- Indigenous people who had been removed from their natural family were almost twice as likely as those who had not been removed from their natural family to have been a victim of violence (38% compared with 23%).
- Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had been a victim of violence, the most commonly reported neighbourhood/community problem was theft (51%) followed by illicit drugs (44%), alcohol (44%) and problems involving youths (43%).
- Indigenous people who reported victimisation were more likely than those who had not reported being a victim of violence to have experienced one or more life stressors (94% compared with 79%).
- After adjusting for age differences (footnote 2) between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, Indigenous people aged 18 years and over were twice as likely as non-Indigenous people to have been a victim of physical or threatened violence (ABS 2004).

LIFE STRESSORS

The four stressor categories (footnote 3) most closely related to crime and justice in the 2002 NATSISS were: witness to violence; abuse or violent crime; trouble with the police; and member of family sent to jail/currently in jail. While respondents may have reported that they, a friend or a family member had experienced one or more of these life stressors, the survey did not collect information about specific events.

Stressor: Witness to violence

- In 2002, 16% of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over reported that they, a friend, or family member, had witnessed violence in the 12 months prior to the survey (ABS 2004).

- Indigenous people in remote areas (footnote 4) were three times as likely as those in non-remote areas to have witnessed violence (30% compared with 10%) (ABS 2004).
- Almost half (45%) of Indigenous people who had been a witness to violence also reported being a victim of physical or threatened violence.

Stressor: Abuse or violent crime

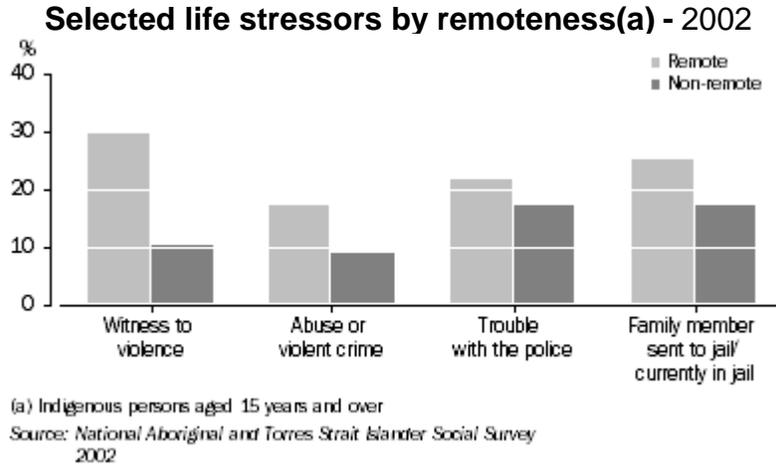
- Overall, 11% of Indigenous people reported abuse or violent crime as a life stressor experienced in the 12 months prior to the survey (ABS 2004).
- Indigenous people living in remote areas were almost twice as likely as those living in non-remote areas to have reported abuse or violent crime as a life stressor (17% compared with 9%) (ABS 2004).
- Indigenous females were around one-and-a-half times more likely than Indigenous males to have reported abuse or violent crime as a life stressor (13% compared with 9%).

Stressor: Trouble with the police

- Around one in five Indigenous people (18%) reported that they, a friend or family member had experienced trouble with the police in the 12 months prior to the survey (ABS 2004).
- Young Indigenous people (aged 15-24 years) were the most likely of any age group to report that they, a friend or family member had experienced trouble with the police (23%).
- Indigenous people who were unemployed were more likely than those who were employed to report that they, a friend or family member had experienced trouble with the police (24% compared with 17%).

Stressor: Family member sent to jail/currently in jail

- Almost one in five Indigenous people (19%) reported a family member being sent to jail/currently in jail (ABS 2004).
- Indigenous people in remote areas were one-and-a-half times more likely than Indigenous people in non-remote areas to report that a family member had been sent to jail or was currently in jail (25% compared to 17%) (ABS 2004).



NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

An individual's perception that family violence, assault and sexual assault are problems in their neighbourhood or community may provide some insights into the likely impact of these events at the community level (footnote 5). However, while respondents were asked whether they thought these situations or events were a problem in their neighbourhood or community, the 2002 NATSISS did not collect information about specific events. Information about neighbourhood/community problems was not collected in the 2002 General Social Survey, therefore there are no available comparisons for the non-Indigenous population.

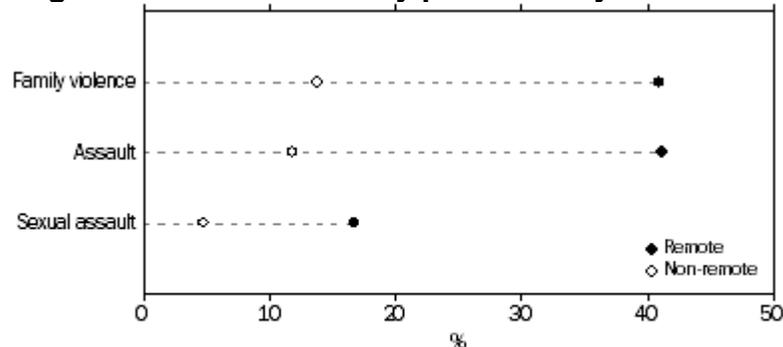
Family violence

- In 2002, one in five Indigenous people aged 15 years and over (21%) reported family violence as a neighbourhood/community problem (ABS 2004).
- Indigenous people in remote areas were nearly three times more likely than those in non-remote areas to report family violence as a neighbourhood or community problem (41% compared with 14%) (ABS 2004).
- Among Indigenous people who reported family violence as a neighbourhood or community problem, 38% also reported being victims of physical or threatened violence.
- More than one-third (36%) of Indigenous people who reported family violence as a community or neighbourhood problem had primary caring responsibility for a child aged 12 years or less.

Assault and sexual assault

- One in five Indigenous people (20%) reported assault as a community or neighbourhood problem, while 8% reported sexual assault as a community or neighbourhood problem (ABS 2004).
- Indigenous people living in remote areas were almost three-and-a-half times more likely than Indigenous people living in non-remote areas to report assault (41% compared with 12%) and sexual assault (17% compared with 5%) as a community or neighbourhood problem (ABS 2004).

Selected neighbourhood/community problems by remoteness(a) - 2002



(a) Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over
 Source: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002

INVOLVEMENT IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Indigenous people tend to have relatively high rates of contact with the criminal justice system and are over-represented in Australian prisons. These high rates may be both a contributing factor to, and an outcome of, the disadvantage that Indigenous people experience across a range of social dimensions (ABS 2004). Prisoners experience high rates of substance use and mental health problems, and may have difficulty reintegrating with their family and community following their release. They also tend to experience high rates of unemployment and lower incomes (ABS 2005).

ARREST IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

- In 2002, one in six Indigenous people aged 15 years and over (16%) reported having been arrested in the five years prior to the survey, down from 20% in 1994. Rates of arrest were similar in remote and non-remote areas (17% and 16% respectively) (ABS 2004).
- Western Australia had the highest proportion of people who reported having been arrested of any state or territory (22%), followed by South Australia (19%) and New South Wales (17%) (ABS 2004).
- Indigenous males were more likely than Indigenous females to report having been arrested (24% compared with 9%) (ABS 2004).
- Indigenous people who had been arrested in the last five years were less likely than those who had not been arrested to have access to support from someone outside their household in a time of crisis (85% compared with 91%).

- Indigenous people who had been arrested were also more likely than those who had not been arrested to be unemployed (29% compared with 11%) and were more likely to be living in households experiencing financial stress (72% compared with 51%).

Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over, Selected characteristics by whether arrested - 2002

Selected characteristics		Arrested(a)	Not arrested(a)	All persons
Unemployed	%	29.2	10.7	13.8
Highest year of school completed year nine or below(b)	%	50.4	39.2	41.1
Fair/poor self-assessed health	%	26.2	22.8	23.3
Has a disability or long term health condition	%	44.3	34.9	36.5
Relative removed from natural family	%	43.6	34.1	35.6
First formal charge at 15 years or below	%	30.5	4.8	9.0
Arrested more than once in the last five years	%	56.4	..	9.3
Victim of physical or threatened violence(c)	%	47.1	19.9	24.3
Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over	'000	46.3	235.9	282.2

.. not applicable

(a) In the last five years

(b) Excludes persons still attending secondary school. Includes persons who never attended school

(c) In the last 12 months

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002

INCARCERATION IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

- In 2002, 7% of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over reported having been incarcerated in the five years prior to the survey (11% of males and 3% of females) (ABS 2004).
- Indigenous people who had been incarcerated were more likely than those who had not been incarcerated to be unemployed (32% compared with 12%).
- Among Indigenous people who had been incarcerated, almost one-third (30%) reported risky/high risk levels of long-term alcohol consumption (footnote 6) in the 12 months prior to the survey, compared with 14% of those who had not been incarcerated.
- In non-remote areas, more than half (56%) of Indigenous people who had been incarcerated reported using an illicit substance (footnote 7) in the 12 months prior to the survey compared with around one in five (21%) of those who had not been incarcerated.

Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over, Selected characteristics by whether incarcerated - 2002

	Incarcerated(a)	Not incarcerated(a)	Total
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Unemployed	%	31.7	12.4	13.8
Highest year of school completed year nine or below(b)	%	57.9	39.7	41.1
Fair/poor self-assessed health	%	25.6	23.1	23.3
Has a disability or long term health condition	%	45.3	35.8	36.5
Relative removed from natural family	%	49.1	34.6	35.6
First formal charge at 15 years or below	%	35.5	7.0	9.0
Arrested more than once in the last five years	%	63.7	5.1	9.3
Victim of physical or threatened violence(c)	%	44.1	22.8	24.3
Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over	'000	20.0	262.1	282.2

(a) In the last five years

(b) Excludes persons still attending secondary school. Includes persons who never attended school

(c) In the last 12 months

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002

INDIGENOUS IMPRISONMENT

The following data is taken from the administrative data collection 2006 National Prisoner's Census. Data is for prisoners aged 18 years and over in every jurisdiction except Queensland, where it is for prisoners aged 17 years and over (ABS 2006).

- At 30 June 2006, there were 6,901 Indigenous prisoners in Australia, representing 24% of the total prisoner population (ABS 2006).
- Nine out of ten Indigenous prisoners (91%) were male (ABS 2006).
- Nationally, the Indigenous crude imprisonment rate was 2,127 per 100,000, with the highest jurisdictional rates in Western Australia (3,385 per 100,000), New South Wales (2,382 per 100,000) and Queensland (1,877 per 100,000)(ABS 2006).
- After adjusting for differences in age structure between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, Indigenous people were 13 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to have been incarcerated in 2006 (ABS 2006).

FOOTNOTES

1. In both the 2002 NATSISS and 1994 NATSIS, 'victim of physical or threatened violence' refers to a person who had physical force or violence used against them, or who was threatened with physical violence, in the 12 months prior to the survey. Differences in the wording of victimisation questions used in the 1994 and 2002 surveys may account, in part, for higher levels of victimisation in 2002 when compared with 1994. Back

2. Some results presented in this paper have been adjusted to account for differences in the age structure between the Australian Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. For further information see the Glossary of the **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002** (cat. no. 4714.0) Back

3. In the 2002 NATSISS, Indigenous people aged 15 years and over were asked about a range of specified events or circumstances that may have been a problem for them, their family, or close friends in the previous 12 months. These included being a witness to violence, abuse or violent crime, trouble with the police and having a family member sent to jail/currently in jail. These four stressors have been included in this analysis. Back

4. In this article, remote areas include the Remoteness categories Remote Australia and Very Remote Australia, while non-remote areas include Major Cities of Australia, Inner Regional Australia and Outer Regional Australia. For further information see **Statistical Geography: Volume 1 - Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) 2006** (ABS cat. no. 1216.0). Back

5. In the 2002 NATSISS, Indigenous people aged 15 years and over were asked whether or not they thought that one or more specified situations or events were a problem in their neighbourhood or community. This snapshot includes some analysis of three of these problems - family violence, assault and sexual assault. Back

6. Measurement of long-term risk of alcohol consumption was based on a person's usual daily consumption of alcohol and the frequency of consumption in the 12 months prior to the survey. Risk levels were based on the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines for risk of harm in the long-term. Risky/high risk equates to 50ml or more of alcohol per day for men and 25ml or more per day for women. Back

7. The use of substances for non-medical purposes. Includes: analgesics; tranquillisers; amphetamines; marijuana; heroin; cocaine; hallucinogens (both synthetic and naturally occurring); ecstasy and other designer drugs; petrol and other inhalants; and kava. The NATSISS collected information on a person's substance use in the 12 months prior to the interview and their substance use to date. This data is available for non-remote areas only. Back

LIST OF REFERENCES

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2006, **Prisoners in Australia**, cat. no. 4517.0, ABS, Canberra

ABS 2005, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: contact with the law', **Australian Social Trends**, cat. no. 4102.0, ABS, Canberra

ABS 2004, **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey**, cat. no. 4714.0, ABS, Canberra

ABS & AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2005, **The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**, ABS cat. no. 4704.0 & AIHW cat. no. IHW14, Canberra