



Department of Corrective Services  
Government of Western Australia

## **Profile of Women in Prison 2003**

Main findings of the *Prisoner Characteristics and Needs Survey*  
of female prisoners in Western Australia 2003

Strategic and Executive Services  
Performance, Statistics and Evaluation

September 2005

***The Department of Justice would like to thank the women who shared their lives with us, the dedicated interviewers who supported these women, and the staff at Justice who gave their commitment and time to the survey.***

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	3
Executive Summary .....	4
Methodology .....	4
Women in contact with the criminal justice system .....	4
Personal characteristics of the women surveyed .....	5
Imprisonment and offending histories.....	5
Family life.....	6
<i>Main carers in childhood</i> .....	6
<i>Parental / carer status</i> .....	6
<i>Visitation by family</i> .....	6
Social disadvantage.....	7
<i>Education and employment</i> .....	7
<i>Health</i> .....	7
<i>Suicide</i> .....	7
<i>Drug and alcohol use</i> .....	8
Prison Life .....	8
<i>Arrival into Prison</i> .....	8
<i>Reception Process</i> .....	8
<i>Visiting arrangements</i> .....	8
<i>Recreational activities</i> .....	9
<i>Religion</i> .....	9
<i>Programs</i> .....	9
<i>Study</i> .....	10
<i>Work</i> .....	10
<i>Other Activities</i> .....	10
<i>Relationships in Prison</i> .....	10
Returning to the community.....	11
Conclusion .....	12

## ***Introduction***

The rise in the number of female prisoners in Western Australia, particularly in the last five years, provided the initial impetus for the Department of Justice to develop a profile of women in prison.

Between 1991 and 1996 the female prisoner population in Western Australia remained relatively constant at approximately 5% of the total prisoner population. The proportion of women in the prison population rose to 7.6% in 1999/2000 and in 2003/2004, the average weekly percentage of women, as a percentage of total prison population, was 11%.

After the first survey was conducted in 2001, it was agreed to undertake the survey every two years to provide the Department of Justice with information to enable ongoing monitoring of the situation for women in prison in Western Australia.

It is intended this profile will:

- Increase community understanding of women in prison; their backgrounds, life experiences, reasons for imprisonment and challenges faced upon release; and
- Assist Department of Justice employees to provide services that best meet the needs of these women within the context of their families and communities;

The first profile was completed in 2002, based on data collected in late 2001. The primary source of information for that report was from the *Prisoner Characteristics and Needs Survey* which surveyed female prisoners in Western Australia between 22 October and 30 November, 2001.

This report builds on the first profile and enables some early consideration of changes in the profile in 2003, compared to 2001.

The report outlines the research methodology used to gather information from female prisoners, including survey scope and design, interview process and limitations. This is followed by an overview of women's contact with the criminal justice system in Western Australia and the extent of use of imprisonment as an outcome of the court process.

The nature of female prisoners' offending behaviours and reasons for imprisonment are presented, with particular reference to different types of offending behaviour and imprisonment patterns for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women.

Information regarding the personal characteristics and family life of female prisoners is presented with a focus on women's role in the community as carers of others, particularly children.

The extent of social disadvantage among women in prison is explored by:

- comparing women in prison and women in the general community in the areas of access to education and employment, sources of income and type of accommodation; and
- an analysis of female prisoners' histories of physical and mental health issues, abuse and drug and substance use prior to imprisonment.

The women's experience of prison life is examined, in particular activities undertaken and relationships with staff and other prisoners. Finally, the female prisoners' intentions regarding life after imprisonment are presented, along with concerns they expressed about their release back into the community.

## ***Executive Summary***

This is the second in a planned regular survey of women in prison in Western Australia. The survey was undertaken in late 2003, and followed a similar, though not identical format to one undertaken in 2001.

### ***Methodology***

The information used to develop this profile of female prisoners is from the *Prisoner Characteristics and Needs Survey* which was conducted between 6 November and 23 December 2003 in all Western Australian prisons that accommodate female prisoners. The participating prisons were Bandyup and Nyandi in the metropolitan area; and Greenough, Roebourne, Broome and Eastern Goldfields in the regional areas of Western Australia.

One hundred and seven women consented to participate. A total of 226 women were in the various prisons on the days that the interviewers visited the prisons. However, the actual response rate is not able to be accurately determined for this survey as there were some difficulties in correctly recording the number of women who were approached to participate in the survey. In addition, unforeseen circumstances caused the survey to be halted before all women could be approached to take part in the survey.

Each interview took approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted on a one to one basis. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interviewers were available at all prisons and women were able to choose which interviewer they wished to be interviewed by.

The survey findings can be generalised to the Western Australian female prisoner population due to the response rate and representativeness of the survey.

### ***Women in contact with the criminal justice system***

Whilst the number of people charged for an offence has remained relatively stable between the years 1992 to 2003, there has been an overall increase in the percentage of females charged with an offence from 18.8% in 1992 to 22.1% in 2003. The number of Aboriginal females being charged as a percentage of all persons charged over the same period increased significantly, from 1358 (4.1%) in 1992 to 3815 (13.4%) in 2003<sup>1</sup>.

Analysis of sentencing data for 2003 for all lower courts shows that males were more commonly imprisoned (8.5%) than females (5.4%)<sup>2</sup>. Females were more likely to receive non-custodial sentences than males (26.9% compared with 16.7%). This is likely to be due to the differences in the types of crimes committed by men as opposed to women.

Aboriginal women are significantly over-represented at all stages of the criminal justice system. In 2001, Aboriginal women represented 2.4% of the female population aged over 18 years in Western Australia, however in 2003 they made up 43.6%<sup>3</sup> of all women charged for an offence and 56% of all women received into a prison in Western Australia.

In 2003, there were 944 females received into prison, of which 565 were Aboriginal accounting for 56% of all women received into prison in 2003.

---

<sup>1</sup> Crime and Justice Statistics for Western Australia 1992 & 2003 Crime Research Centre

<sup>2</sup> Crime and Justice Statistics for Western Australia: 2003 Crime Research Centre Table xiv

<sup>3</sup> Crime and Justice Statistics for Western Australia: 2003 Crime research Centre Table 2.4

### ***Personal characteristics of the women surveyed***

Consistent with the 2001 study, more than two thirds of women surveyed were aged from 18 to 35 years of age down from 72% in 2001 with Aboriginal women in general being younger than non Aboriginal women.

The percentage of non Aboriginal women (56%) and Aboriginal women (44%) in this survey population was similar to that of the previous study (59% 41% respectively).

Eighty four percent (84%) of women surveyed were Australian born, and 88% identified English as their first language. Eight percent (8%) of women identified an Aboriginal language as their first language. A small proportion of the women were born overseas and identified with cultures other than Australian.

### ***Imprisonment and offending histories***

The finding in the 2003 study in regards to imprisonment and offending histories were similar to 2001.

The majority of non Aboriginal women were in metropolitan prisons and the majority of Aboriginal women were in regional prisons. However, on this occasion, more non Aboriginal women were located in metropolitan prisons up 14% and less Aboriginal women were in regional prisons down 9%. Just over two thirds of the participants were sentenced prisoners, and one fifth were on remand.

Overall, the patterns of number of convictions were similar with a large majority of women having convicted of more than one offence and more non Aboriginal women (34%) than Aboriginal women (9%) had no previous convictions or only one previous conviction.

In 2003, 31% of non Aboriginal women had ten or more convictions compared to 23% of Aboriginal women. This was the reverse of the 2001 study, where the rates were 24% for non Aboriginal women and 32% for Aboriginal women.

There was a marked difference between non Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women in terms of the offences they had committed. Drug offences and offences of fraud and misappropriation were the most frequently noted serious offences committed by non Aboriginal women but no Aboriginal women noted these offences. Assault (excluding sexual assault) was the most frequently noted serious offence committed by Aboriginal women, with this offence being reported by only one non Aboriginal woman.

Of the sentenced women, over a third were in prison for breaching release orders, slightly down from 2001 Rates of non compliance and re offending were also lower for non Aboriginal women (30%) than for Aboriginal women (51%).

Considerably more women (79%) who had been sentenced had an expected time in prison of less than one year in this study, compared to the 2001 study, (59%). Consistent with the previous study, more Aboriginal women had an expected time in prison of less than one year than non Aboriginal women (89% and 70% respectively). However, there was a large shift in the proportion of non Aboriginal women who expected to be in prison for less than one year raising from 42% in 2001 non Aboriginal women 70% in 2003.

## **Family life**

### *Main carers in childhood*

The majority of women (91%) were raised by their parent/s or extended family members. There was also a slight decrease in the percentage of women raised in foster care (2% from 6% in 2001).

There was little change in the percentage of women who reported being made a Ward of the State at some time during their childhood (16% compared to 19% in 2001). However, in 2003 proportion of non Aboriginal women compared to Aboriginal women who had been a Ward of the State at some time was less in than 2001.

In 2001 double the proportion of Aboriginal women (26%) reported being made a Ward of the State as a child, compared to 13% of their non-Aboriginal counterparts whereas in 2003, 15% of non Aboriginal women and 18% of Aboriginal women had been made a Ward of the State.

### *Parental / carer status*

More women in this study (62%) were carers of dependent children, other family members or other non family dependents than in the 2001 study (43%). Of these, 80% had their own children compared to 88% in 2001.

Consistent with the 2001 study, almost half the women with children were aged from 26 to 35 years (47% in 2003, 49% in 2001). However, for Aboriginal women the age group that had the highest number of children were aged 18 to 25 years (40%).

The number of women with children who did not have some or all of their children in care immediately prior to their imprisonment was less in 2003 (17%) than in 2001 (49%). Forty five percent of women overall were single mothers (48% in 2001). Thirty eight percent (38%) of non Aboriginal women were single mothers and 53% of Aboriginal women were single mothers.

Almost all women who were caring for their children immediately prior to imprisonment intended to resume caring for their children upon release.

The majority of the women not caring for their children prior to imprisonment also hoped to live with their children (aged less than 18 years) upon their release, even though they were not the primary carers of these children prior to imprisonment.

In almost half the cases, children who had been dependents of the women surveyed were being cared for by grandparents (26%) or their fathers (20%).

### *Visitation by family*

Almost half of the women (48%) who had cared for dependents immediately prior to imprisonment received visits from them at least once a fortnight, compared to (33%) in 2001. Twenty five percent reported receiving no visits by former dependents compared to 44% in 2001.

Almost half of the women (48%) would like daily visits from their former dependents, with 75% wanting visits once a fortnight or more often. This compares with 87% in 2001.

Almost all women who were caring for their children immediately prior to imprisonment (98%) intended to resume caring for their children upon release. For those who anticipated difficulties in resuming care, the same reasons were most frequently noted in both the 2003 and 2001 studies, these being custody issues (50% of those who expected difficulties) and problems in finding suitable accommodation (44%).

## ***Social disadvantage***

Women in prison represent a very disadvantaged group in the community.

### *Education and employment*

Twenty five percent of the women surveyed had not received a formal education to the completion of Year 10 a decrease from 40% in 2001. The differences in the level of education and post school study between the non Aboriginal women and the Aboriginal women were consistent with the 2001 study.

Sixty five percent (65%) of women reported that were not employed in the six months prior to their arrest, compared to down from 71% in 2001. Unemployment was lower for non Aboriginal women at 56% than Aboriginal women at 76%. Similar numbers of women had never been employed in both studies (35% in 2001 and 26% in 2003). However, slightly more Aboriginal women (56%) had never been employed in 2003 than 2001 (56% and 51% respectively).

There were some changes in the areas of employment in which most women had worked. The top areas in order of frequency were hospitality, manual labour, clerical administration and sales. In 2001 the areas were hospitality, clerical administration, sales and manual labour.

In regard to sources of income, the women surveyed in 2003 were more dependent on government benefits for their income up 18% from 67% to 85%. However, there was a drop in the percentage of women who reported crime related activities to be a source of income in 2003, down to 6% from 16% in 2001.

### *Health*

Many women reported compromised physical health. More women in the 2003 study reported a diagnosis of a physical health issue prior to imprisonment than in 2001 (72% and 61% respectively).

The most common health issues reported in 2003 and 2001 were back problems and asthma, with other conditions such as heart problems, diabetes and cancer also reported. Reporting rates were similar between non Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women, except that there was a marked difference in reporting of back conditions (41% of non Aboriginal women and 16% of Aboriginal women)

A similar percentage of women had been tested for blood borne communicable diseases including Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS in 2003 and 2001. Of the women who reported being tested in this study, 38% received a positive result. Hepatitis C was by far the most commonly diagnosed blood borne communicable disease in 2003, with 20% women reporting a positive test result.

Fewer women (37%) reported a diagnosed mental health issue in this study than in the 2001 study (51%). There was also a decrease in the proportion of women who reported not having received treatment from a mental health professional (64% in 2003 compared to 74% in 2001).

Unipolar depression remained the most frequently reported mental health issue although there was a large decrease in the percentage of women who reported this condition, down to 16% from 36% in 2001. Anxiety was the second most frequently reported mental health issue in both studies, but was the most frequently reported mental health issue by Aboriginal women in 2003.

### *Suicide*

Prior to imprisonment, fewer women (39%) had seriously thought about or attempted suicide than in 2001 (51%). Just less than one quarter of women (23%) had seriously thought about or attempted suicide since imprisonment.

Eight percent of women had self harmed since their imprisonment compared with 16% in 2001.

#### *Drug and alcohol use*

A similar percentage of women reported having used alcohol or drugs at least four times per month in the six month period prior to their arrest (78% in 2003 and 80% in 2001), Nearly all women reported alcohol as the most used substance followed by marijuana. The use of amphetamines/ speed was considerably higher among non Aboriginal women (73%) than Aboriginal women (55%), as was the use of heroin, with its reported use by 36% of non Aboriginal women and 13% of Aboriginal women.

Fifty one percent (51%) of women reported a connection between their offending behaviour and their use of alcohol or drugs compared to 67% in 2001. Less non Aboriginal women (48%) reported a connection than did Aboriginal women (55%).

Thirty four percent (34%) of non Aboriginal women and 35% of Aboriginal women reported being under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time their offences were committed.

### **Prison Life**

#### *Arrival into Prison*

A majority of the women (92%) surveyed had concerns about their imprisonment when they first came into prison. Nearly three quarters of the women had concerns about the impact on their families. In 2003, more women reported that they were offered support on arrival into prisons (60%) than in 2001 (44%). However this still leaves 40% of the women reporting receiving no support.

#### *Reception Process*

In 2003, 65% of Aboriginal women were satisfied or very satisfied with the reception process compared to 57% in 2001. The reasons for satisfaction included supportive and helpful staff (17%), process was fair (13%), and familiarity with the system (6%). Reasons for dissatisfaction included staff not supportive or helpful (14%), insufficiency of the orientation process (8%) and strip searches (4%). More women (71%) suggested changes to the reception process in 2003 than in 2001 (60%). The most common suggestions included more understanding from staff (17%) and better explanations about rules (11%).

The women also suggested that a different process be in place for women facing their first time in prison, faster and more efficient processing, better peer support and cultural and offence sensitivity.

#### *Visiting arrangements*

The 2003 study showed that almost all women received visitors. In 2003 there was no difference in the percentage of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal women with 83% and 75% respectively.

Family members were the most often reported visitors, being noted by 63% of the women. Significantly more women reported receiving visits from children (52%) and friends (46%) in the 2003 study than in the 2001 study (25% and 34%). The numbers of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal women receiving visits from their children was comparable in 2003 (52% and 51% respectively).

There was a slight decrease in the percentage of women who reported they were satisfied with visiting arrangements down to 52% from 58% in 2001. A slight increase was also reported in levels of dissatisfaction rising to 35% in 2003 from 26% in 2001.

Satisfaction decreased more among non Aboriginal women (27% in 2003 and 54% in 2001) than Aboriginal women (57% in 2003 and 63% in 2001). It seems that increased numbers of visitors has not increased Aboriginal women's satisfaction with visiting arrangements.

Of the 79% who reported concerns in 2003, the most frequently expressed concerns were issues around the security process (33%), the small size of the visiting area (22%), transport difficulties (15%) and lack of privacy (10%)

#### *Recreational activities*

Seventy percent (70%) of the women surveyed in 2003 were involved in a range of recreational activities prior to their arrest compared to 60% in 2001, with the main activity 'team sports' (41%). Women maintained their recreation, sports and hobbies at a similar rate in prison to prior to their arrest. In 2003, 71% of women surveyed were engaged in activities while in prison.

Overall, considerably more women were satisfied with recreational activities in 2003 (46%) than in 2001 (28%). Interestingly, the increased satisfaction is almost entirely among non Aboriginal women up from 20% to 42% in 2003. The main reason for dissatisfaction was the range and opportunities for activities (33%).

#### *Religion*

In 2003, an increased percentage of women reported they felt that their spiritual, cultural and religious needs were being met (71% compared to 61% in 2001). The main reason identified for needs not being met was that prison did not cater for the woman's religion and culture.

#### *Programs*

There was a small increase in the percentage of women that were involved in, or had undertaken, programs whilst in prison at the time of the survey (56% up from 53% in 2001). However, the participation of Aboriginal women has increased. In 2003, the same percentage of non Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women participated in programs, whereas in 2001, 62% of non Aboriginal women participated compared to 38% of Aboriginal women.

In 2003 only 4% of women participated in alcohol and substance misuse programs, compared with 37% in 2001 when it was the most frequently identified program. The most frequently identified program in 2003 was Occupational Health and Safety, mentioned by 22% of women.

Just over half the women were involved in programs offered by the prison which were not a requirement of parole, and 38% were involved in activities that were a requirement for parole. More non-Aboriginal women participated in programs for parole than Aboriginal women, 56% compared to 23%.

Overall satisfaction with programs undertaken was higher in 2003 (45%) than in 2001 (34%).

The proportion of women who had not participated in any programs was similar across both studies. However, the difference in participation rates between non Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women had diminished with 44% of non Aboriginal women and 49% of Aboriginal women not participating in any programs in 2003, compared to 35% and 58% respectively in 2001.

Almost three quarters of the women (74%) offered suggestions for types of programs most needed by the women whilst in prison. The most often suggested programs were life skills, budgeting and employment programs, and personal development programs, with each being suggested by 20% of women. Parenting programs (18%) were the next most frequently suggested, followed by alcohol and substance misuse programs (12%).

### *Study*

More women in the 2003 study (57%) were participating in study or courses than in the 2001 study (50%). Overall, more non Aboriginal women (61%) were participating in study than Aboriginal women (49%). More women were participating in TAFE/Vocational courses in 2003 (20%) than in 2001 (11%). Fewer women were undertaking school level education, 4% in 2003 compared to 23% in 2001. Satisfaction with study undertaken increased in 2003 for non-Aboriginal women (from 46% to 51%) and Aboriginal women (from 28% to 46%).

### *Work*

The most common work activity reported by women surveyed was cleaning, undertaken by 44% of the women, followed by garden and nursery (28%), kitchen (24%) laundry (15%), and garments (11%). These were also the top four activities in the 2001 study.

In both studies, Aboriginal women were more involved in cleaning work (54% in 2003 and 37% in 2001) than non Aboriginal women (38% in 2003 and 15% in 2001) and non Aboriginal women were more involved in kitchen work (29% in 2003 and 19% in 2001) than Aboriginal women (17% in 2003 and 7% in 2001).

A majority of the women (82%) were satisfied with the work activities, the most frequent reason being that it occupied time (22%). Satisfaction with work activities had risen among Aboriginal women (90% in 2003 and 76% in 2001) but dropped slightly for non Aboriginal women to 74% in 2003 from 79% in 2001.

### *Other Activities*

Overall, 81% of women had ideas for other activities that would be of benefit to them, including life skills (13%) arts and crafts (12%) gender equity (11%) and fitness (11%).

### *Relationships in Prison*

A majority of women (59%) described their relationship with prison staff as good or ok, a slight decrease from 61% in the 2001 study. A further 28% said that relationships varied for different officers, a comment also made by 24% of women in 2001. There was little difference in the responses between non Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women.

There were considerable differences in results when women were then asked to describe the prisoner-staff relationship for other prisoners. In this study 32% considered the relationship to be good/great/fine, a large increase compared to 14% in 2001. In 2003, 12% considered that the relationship depended on the officer/prisoner while in 2001, 41% held this view.

However, despite the overall more positive perceptions about the relationship, slightly more women in this study (18%) considered relationships to be not good, or bad, compared to 16% in 2001. There were no significant differences in responses from non Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women.

The five attributes that makes a good prison officer were very similar in each study, although not in the same order. Being able to listen was the most frequently noted attribute (23%) followed by being understanding (22%), being non judgemental (18%), treating people equally and fairly (14%) and acting with professionalism at work (13%).

More than three quarters of the women (77%) said that the gender of the prison officer did not matter, a similar response to the 2001 survey when 74% said that gender did not matter.

More women (68%) considered their relationship with other prisoners to be good/great/fine in this study than in the 2001 study (53%) with minimal difference in response between non Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women (68% and 67% respectively).

Seventy two percent (72%) of women reported that they felt safe or very safe in prison which is slightly less than in 2001 when 76% reported that they felt safe or very safe. Considerably more Aboriginal women (90%) reported feeling safe or very safe than non Aboriginal women (60%).

Less women felt unsafe or very unsafe (8%) compared to 2001 (13%). In both studies the behaviour of other prisoners was the most frequently given reason for feeling unsafe. Other reasons noted in 2003 included poor safety procedures/fear of punishment (5%) and prison life being daunting (4%).

Forty five percent (45%) of women reported that they had been victims of bullying in prison. The identified source of the bullying was fairly equally spread across staff (16%) other prisoners (16%) and staff and prisoners (13%).

In this study, the most frequent suggestion was staff listening and taking complaints seriously (10%), followed by improving staff and prison management (9%) and punishing or educating the bully (7%). The differences between responses from non Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women were not significant.

### ***Returning to the community***

An important issue for women in prison and members of the community is the prisoners' release from prison and return to the community. Sixty three percent (63%) of the respondents expected to be released within six months, comparable to the 2001 study in which 62% expected to be released within six months. Slightly fewer women (24%) expected to spend more than one more year in prison in this study compared to 2001 (28%).

Expected time until release was comparatively longer for the non-Aboriginal women compared to the Aboriginal women. Fifty two percent (52%) of non Aboriginal women expected to be released within 6 months compared to 80% of Aboriginal women. This was consistent with the 2001 study in which 49% of the non Aboriginal women expected to be released within 6 months compared to 85% of the Aboriginal women.

In both studies most women reported that they knew whom they would live with and where they would live once they were released from prison.

Fifty four percent (54%) of the women expected to gain employment on their release compared with 49% in 2001 and the same percentage reported they would be caring for others upon their release.

In this study more women (78%) were confident that they would not re offend compared with 2001, when 66% said that they would be unlikely to re offend. As with the 2001 study, Aboriginal women were less confident than the non-Aboriginal women that they were not likely to re-offend.

More women (69%) in the 2003 study expressed concerns about their release than in the 2001 study (58%). The most common concerns included rebuilding their family and their friendships when they returned to the community, coping skills with regard to their re-entry, drug use when released from prison, accommodation, income and employment, community attitudes towards ex-prisoners and also their likelihood of re-offending.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of the Prisoner Characteristics and Needs Survey are largely consistent with those from other jurisdictions. Typically, it would appear that female prisoners in industrialised nations experience social disadvantage across such areas as education and employment; live with complex health issues; present with histories of drug and alcohol misuse and also histories of past abuse, both as adults and as children. The responses to the survey also tell of the disruption of the families of female prisoners and the difficulties faced in maintaining family relationships during a period of imprisonment.

While there were some differences in responses to the same questions in the 2003 and 2001 study, it is too early to draw conclusions about those differences, especially as there were some changes in methodology and the number and location of the women who participated.

There are a few areas where the results of the Western Australian Prisoner Characteristics and Needs Survey differ from those of other jurisdictions. For example, the women in the prison population of the United States of America and Canada were more likely to be employed at the time of their arrest than women in prison in Western Australia. However, the Western Australian findings concur with British reports.

The reporting of health issues of the women surveyed in Western Australia was generally similar to those findings in other Australian states, although there were some differences. Rates of Hepatitis C infection reported in Western Australian prisoners were under those reported in New South Wales. As well, Western Australian female prisoners reported a higher rate of previous diagnosis of a mental health illness, at approximately twice the level than the survey population in New South Wales.

The extreme, systemic disadvantage experienced by the Aboriginal women who participated in this survey is illustrated throughout the report. The findings of the survey suggest that many of these women have lives of extreme hardship. Further research in this area is needed to better understand the extent of this disadvantage and the diversity of the experiences of Aboriginal women who are imprisoned.

The Profile of Women in Prison provides valuable information that has not previously been collected in one place. This information is useful for the ongoing monitoring of the attitudes and perceptions of the women who live in Western Australian prison facilities, and for future planning and service provision. Additionally, this report has capacity to increase community understanding of women in prison; their backgrounds, life experiences, reasons for imprisonment and challenges faced upon release.