

THE IMPACT OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM AND
INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA UPON THE INCARCERATION OF
ABORIGINALS

by

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Abstract

This was a qualitative research study involving Aboriginal offenders at a Federal institution in the Ontario Region. The purpose of this study was to illuminate the Aboriginal offenders' perspectives on their experiences that led to their incarceration.

The major research questions guiding this study include:

1. What experiences do Aboriginal offenders feel contributed to their incarceration?
2. What do Aboriginal offenders feel could have prevented their incarceration?
3. How do Aboriginal offenders describe their experiences with the Residential School and child welfare systems?
4. What are the Aboriginal offenders' perspectives on their experiences with CSC's healing and intervention programs?

One of the goals of this study was to provide information to CSC to improve the reintegration programs and help Aboriginal offenders become law abiding citizens. The data was collected from individual interviews, which was analyzed in detail to develop themes.

The analyses sought for stories that captured the depth of the experiences that led to the Aboriginal offenders' incarcerations.

This study provided the personal perspective of the offenders as to how the Residential School and child welfare system have impacted their lives, and offers some insight into the over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in the prison system. This study also demonstrated how the socio-economic situation of these Aboriginal offenders played a role in their path towards prison. It is important to capture the voices of the

Aboriginal offenders' experiences towards incarceration. Their stories offer ways to help other Aboriginal people.

We must have Aboriginal community members involved in the lives of Aboriginal youth to prevent them from getting into trouble, and find alternative positives outlets and activities. We must instill and provide hope and inspiration so that our youth have something to look forward to in their lives. I know this is happening to varying degrees in our Aboriginal communities; however, we need to keep working towards this goal. In addition, CSC might consider allocating more resources and financial assistance to Aboriginal communities, who are dealing with their people involved within the prison system.

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Finally, I want to thank Ed Wissian, who was my Aboriginal Research Assistant in this study. Unfortunately, Ed Wissian passed away on June 21, 2010 which happens to be Aboriginal Day. Mr. Wissian was a great man with a tremendous passion for helping Aboriginal people. I had the privilege to read some personal notes Mr. Wissian wrote in his dairy in May 2010. He had highlighted that Aboriginal people must be treated equally. He wrote in order for this to occur, the Aboriginal person must give up his identity and become non-Aboriginal, thus, he will be treated equally. He also wrote about

how Aboriginal people were suppressed in society and how the Indian Act and Residential Schools were tools used to implement this suppression. After reading this powerful statement, I thought about how instrumental he was in assisting me with my research study. It's fitting to see how he helped make this study possible as the main purpose of the study was to help incarcerated Aboriginal people, something Mr. Wissian loved to do. He will be missed and always remembered by me and so many other members of the Aboriginal community.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My life experience as an Aboriginal person provides me with first-hand experience in understanding the impact of the Residential School and the child welfare system. My biological mother was a Residential School survivor, who was exposed to an unhealthy social, emotional and volatile environment, which robbed her of a healthy life path. As well, I have professional work experiences as an Aboriginal Community Development Officer (ACDO) for Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) for eight years and my experiences as an RCMP officer in Alberta working in several Aboriginal communities.

My other work experience pertaining to Aboriginal subjects includes positions as an: Outreach Worker for the Native Council of Prince Edward Island; Family Violence Worker for the Aboriginal Women's Association, and a Community Support Officer for the Nisnawbe-Aski Nation Police Service. My fourteen years of experience in the criminal justice field, coupled with my two undergraduate degrees in Native Studies and Sociology, has provided me with a wealth of information related to Aboriginal issues, and these are discussed in my research.

Through this study, I am determined to assist with the healing of the Aboriginal offenders who suffer from intergenerational trauma caused, at least in part, by the Residential School and child welfare systems. As a result of this study, I have gained a better appreciation and understanding of how cultural, ceremonial, spiritual programs and services have a profound influence on addressing trauma suffered by Aboriginal offenders. I am more familiar with how the Elders, Aboriginal programs and services

help with Aboriginal offenders inside the prison walls. However, the rates of incarceration for Aboriginals have not changed over the last eight years. CSC (1999) noted that adult Aboriginal people are incarcerated at more than six times the national rate. In Saskatchewan, the adult Aboriginal incarceration rate is over 1,600 per 100,000, compared to 48 per 100,000 for adult non-Aboriginals. The number of Aboriginal offenders is expected to rise dramatically over the next decade as a result of the high birth rates of the Aboriginal population. CSC requires more focus and attention on issues related to the suffering experienced by many of these incarcerated Aboriginal offenders.

CSC staff has only peeled away a few layers of the immense pain and suffering these individuals have experienced related to Residential School and the child welfare system. I suggest that more layers still need to be peeled away to effectively offer healing and have these Aboriginal offenders become law abiding citizens, at the same time, addressing the issue of over-incarceration rates.

Purpose

The purpose of my study was to document the Aboriginal offenders' perspectives on the experiences that led to their incarceration. My study provided an opportunity and space for the Aboriginal offender to share these personal stories related to their experiences. Also, it will allow for the Aboriginal offenders to share their perspectives and experiences with CSC's healing/intervention programs.

The major research questions guiding this study include:

1. What experiences do Aboriginal offenders feel contributed to their incarceration?
2. What do Aboriginal offenders feel could have prevented their incarceration?

3. How do Aboriginal offenders describe their experiences with the Residential School and child welfare systems?

4. What are the Aboriginal offenders' perspectives on their experiences with CSC's healing/intervention programs?

Ultimately, this study will be a small piece of the puzzle that may assist CSC in implementing more programs and reintegration tools and supports directed towards incarcerated Aboriginal offenders becoming law abiding citizens of society.

Significance of the Study

Previous research has provided information about Aboriginal offenders being over-represented in federal institutions. They have also stated that the majority of Aboriginal offenders share a history with the Residential School and child welfare systems. For example, 95 percent of the Aboriginal offenders at the Prince Albert Penitentiary in Saskatchewan were adopted or placed in foster care at some point in their lives (Rudin, n.d.). Various inquiries and reports note that Aboriginal people are over-represented in virtually all aspects of the criminal justice system (CSC, 1999; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Other research clearly demonstrates an over-representation of Aboriginal people in the correctional system (Milloy, 1999; Rudin, n.d.).

In 2004, CSC realized that the historic trauma (effects of the Residential School and the child welfare system) endured by Aboriginal offenders must be reflected in the treatment and rehabilitation of these offenders. This begins at intake assessment (reception unit where all offenders are admitted into CSC's custody), where the

Aboriginal offender's history and case is reviewed, in order to assist them with their reintegration efforts toward becoming law-abiding citizens.

Despite several studies that establish a link between the over-representation of Aboriginals incarcerated by the prison system and their experiences with the Residential School and child welfare systems (Menzie, 2006; Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996; Rudin, n.d.; Stonefish, 2007), few studies document Aboriginal offenders' perspectives on their experiences with the Residential School and child welfare systems. There is also limited research that examines Aboriginal offenders' perception of the rehabilitation programs they experience once incarcerated. By filling this gap, this research study aims to provide insight to researchers and practitioners interested in understanding the experiences of Aboriginal offenders and those at risk to become offenders.

Rationale

This study will provide an opportunity for the Aboriginal participants to better understand their own stories and start a new healing path, which may also help others heal. The idea of transferability occurs when one person begins reading another person's story and starts to comprehend and recognize their own stories. Telling stories can contribute to a healing process of these Aboriginal offenders.

This research study may help first time federally sentenced Aboriginal inmates feel less isolated in prison and lead to a greater awareness of the role their childhood and personal history played in their incarceration. This might alleviate some of the self-blaming and negative feelings offenders frequently express. It can help incoming inmates understand the broader context and systemic issues related to their incarceration; as well,

it may help non-offenders see the road most traveled, in terms of criminal activity and incarceration, and look for alternative routes.

This study will hopefully provide a deeper appreciation and understanding of the perception and personal struggles as it relates to the Aboriginal offender's experiences with the Residential School and child welfare systems. It is anticipated that this study could contribute to the existing correctional interventions directed towards Aboriginal offenders and assist CSC staff with enhancing their understanding of the factors leading to Aboriginal offenders to incarceration. It also may help to address and improve the rehabilitative and release planning processes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over-representation of Aboriginal Offenders

This research study has three key objectives. First, it will review the problem of the impact of the Residential School, child welfare system and intergenerational trauma upon the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people within the prison system. Braun (1998) provides a comparison of Aboriginal offenders to the children who attended the Residential Schools, where prison officials would often assign them to work camps or prison farms, rather than trades or vocational training because of a belief that Aboriginal people possess low levels of education, lack of or poor employment skills and show little interest in acquiring a trade. Aboriginal students at the Residential Schools were treated much like these prisoners. Learning from experienced colonizers (e.g., England), the Indian Residential Schools were modeled on the British Prison system (McCormick & Wong, 2005). When looking at the current justice system in comparison to the Residential Schools, there are numerous similarities between the two. Secondly, personal perspectives and data will be generated from one-on-one interviews from federally sentenced Aboriginal offenders. Thirdly, a contribution will be made towards creating better approaches and interventions to help decrease the number of Aboriginal offenders.

Over-representation occurs when we see more members of a particular group enmeshed in the criminal justice system than anticipated given the percentage the group represents within the population. The assumption behind this type of analysis is that groups should be represented in the criminal justice system in roughly the same proportion they are represented in the general population (Roach & Rudin, 2000).

In various remote northern First Nations communities (where many Aboriginal people live) research shows these Aboriginal youth are committing crimes with the objective to be incarcerated in youth detention centers located in larger urban centers. These youth have heard favorable things from others who have served time at these detention centers such as daily recreational activities and meals, while escaping over-crowded living conditions, poverty and the harsh conditions of some of these remote Aboriginal communities. Many Aboriginal youth commit crime and wait until the officer arrives to be taken into custody. One police officer says “even when we don’t find out who did the crime, the youth involved will turn themselves in (York, 1990).”

An addiction counselor of a First Nations community in Northern Manitoba estimated, “that at least 30 percent of the youth are committing crimes just to escape from the First Nation reserve (York, 1990).” An Aboriginal offender from a northern remote community, where he has been in trouble with the law, sixteen of his twenty-six years, stated, “jail is better than the over-crowded houses, where there is no running water and there are few jobs and recreational opportunities. I don’t feel anything anymore when I go to court. It’s just routine now... We have nothing to look forward to when we get up in the morning. We get frustrated and scared. We don’t give a damn what happens to anybody any more because nobody gives a damn about us. The only thing we know is to cause trouble and go to jail, where you have three meals a day and a place to sleep and a TV to look at.”

In 1999, the Supreme Court recognized the stark Aboriginal over-representation in prison as a “sad and pressing social problem” and one that “may reasonably be termed a 'crisis' in the Canadian criminal justice system.” Since 1999, this over-representation of

Aboriginal offenders has continued to increase - a crisis then, but how would it be defined now?

The Court made a very significant finding with regard to Aboriginal people and the prison system:

As has been emphasized repeatedly in studies and commission reports, Aboriginal offenders are, as a result of these unique systemic and background factors, more adversely affected by incarceration and less likely to be “rehabilitated” thereby, because the internment milieu is often culturally inappropriate and regrettably discrimination towards them is so often rampant in penal institutions. (Laforme, 2005, punishment section, para. 4)

Around this time (2005), the courts were dealing with a legal case called Gladue.

The Gladue decision provided the criminal justice system in Canada with a new approach when sentencing Aboriginal people. The Gladue decision was a court case involving a 19-year old Aboriginal woman who stabbed and killed her husband and pleaded guilty to manslaughter. The woman was given a three-year sentence. Ms. Gladue appealed on the basis that the Judge did not adequately consider Aboriginal circumstances in her case. The judge did not take into consideration section 718.2 (e) of the criminal code, whereby he stated that this lady being Aboriginal was not relevant because she was not living on the reserve. Section 718.2 (e) applies to all aboriginal persons wherever they reside, whether on or off reserve, in a large city or a rural area. Section 718.2 (e) states that judges “should look for alternatives to incarceration when sentencing offenders and should pay particular attention to the circumstances of Aboriginal people.” It requires judges to consider “the unique systemic or background factors, which may have played a part in bringing the particular aboriginal offender before the courts,” including “low incomes, high employment, lack of opportunities and options, lack of relevance of

education, substance abuse, loneliness, and community fragmentation” (Roach & Rudin, 2000).

Other systemic and background factors to take into account when sentencing Aboriginal people are: poverty as a child or an adult, within an offender’s family, or community; overt or covert racism in the community by family members, strangers, school or workplace; sexual, emotional, physical and spiritual abuse; and foster care or adoption (Campbell Research Associates, 2008; Law Courts Education Society, 2005 as cited in Maurutto & Hannah-Moffat, 2010).

CSC has adopted the spirit of Gladue by taking into consideration the Aboriginal offenders’ backgrounds and historical circumstances that have led them to incarceration. Again, this was another step to address the over-representation of the Aboriginal offenders’ population.

Welsh and Ogloff (2008) stated, “As of April 9, 2006, Aboriginal offenders represented 16.6 percent of the federal offender population despite comprising only 3.38 percent of the Canadian general population” (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, as cited in Welsh & Ogloff, 2008, p. 2). There has been a great deal of attention by the Federal and Provincial courts on the issue of overt racism and unwarranted disparity in the conviction and sentencing of Aboriginal people. Section 718.2(e) is a significant recognition of the position of Aboriginal offenders in the criminal justice system. This decision requires sentencing Judges to consider the unique systemic factors that may have brought a particular offender before the courts. It considers “the types of sentencing procedures and sanctions, which may be appropriate in the circumstances for

the offender because of his or her particular Aboriginal heritage or connection” (Roach & Rudin, 2000, para. 1).

Welsh and Ogloff (2008) showed that Aboriginal offenders who have a higher rate of substance abuse, are more likely to have served a prior federal sentence, and are disproportionately convicted of violent offences. This finding is possibly related to the historical traumatic abuses suffered by Aboriginals through the Residential School and child welfare systems. This research study described how more work must be done to understand the nature of the over-representation of incarcerated Aboriginal offenders.

Residential Schools operated for over a hundred years, producing intensive and systemic resocialization and deprogramming, while destroying the culture and identity of Aboriginal children. This inflicts endless grief onto Aboriginal communities, which can be seen in the eyes of so many Aboriginal inmates, who are either survivors or who had parents that attended the Residential Schools (Richardson & Nelson, 2007).

Ross (cited in Braun, 1998, p.18) highlighted Hollow Water's Community

Holistic Circle Healing Program's views on incarceration:

Incarceration, they concluded, actually works against the healing process, because “an already unbalanced person is further moved out of balance.” The team also came to believe that the threat of incarceration prevents people from “coming forward and taking responsibility for the hurt they have caused. It reinforces the silence, therefore promotes rather than breaks, the cycle of violence that exists.”

From an Aboriginal perspective or worldview, jails are seen to create imbalance in the four aspects of healing; spiritual, physical, mental and emotional. Many prison systems often have a very negative environment, which can fuel Aboriginal offenders' anger and emotions rather than resolve them. Many Aboriginal offenders become alienated and are discriminated against by the prison system because of their different

values, beliefs and worldviews, which has contributed to their being over-represented in the system. As a result, the Canadian Criminal Justice System has failed the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. The principal reason for this failure is the fundamentally different worldview of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with respect to such elemental issues as the substantive content of justice and the process of achieving justice (Royal Commission Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996, p.309). Historically, Aboriginal communities have had a different method towards dealing and achieving justice within their communities. For Aboriginal people, such things as loss of land and control over living conditions, suppression of belief systems and spirituality, and racial discrimination, have seriously damaged their confidence and predisposed them to engage in breaking the law, suicide and other self-destructive behaviours (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996).

Laforme (2005) indicates that some researchers argue that the social and political violence inflicted upon Aboriginal children, families and communities by the state and the church, through the Residential School and child welfare systems, not only created the patterns of violence the communities are experiencing, but also introduced the family and the community to behaviors that impede their collective recovery. This marginalization of Aboriginal people has put them at a greater risk for high rates of violence and abuse. The long-term consequences are: intergenerational ineffective parenting; poverty; unemployment; substance abuse; low levels of education; and the widespread acceptance that violence is the norm (Laforme, 2005). Many Aboriginal offenders have come from these inadequate conditions and have been exposed to violence

since childhood. This can be traced back to their individual history and to the remnants of the Residential School system.

Laforme (2005) leaves you with the thoughts of an Aboriginal leader a few years back. When asked to comment on the issue of the relationship of Aboriginal people, the courts and jail, and the notion of a foreign justice system, Laforme's comments are consistent with Aboriginal people being at a disadvantage, he replied:

The Aboriginal person will probably appear before a white judge, be defended and prosecuted by white lawyers, and if he goes to jail he will be supervised by white guards. The justice system is often seen as a white man's weapon—a heavy hand that enforces his laws. It is them and us ... the white man's law (unknown, cited in Laforme, 2005, conclusion, para 2).

Examining the circumstances of Aboriginal offenders prior to their arrest, the known difficulties they have upon incarceration and the particular social obstacles that Aboriginal peoples face, will help provide a deeper understanding of the social conditions and intergenerational trauma that impacts Aboriginal offenders (Milloy, 1999).

Other research has shown evidence that the Residential School and child welfare systems created tools to assimilate and attempt to destroy Aboriginal culture, language, and identity, so they could become part of the dominant white society. However, there is a need for more research in the area of sexual, physical and mental abuses suffered by Aboriginal people, which have perpetuated intergenerational traumas impacting the incarceration of Aboriginals.

The Residential School System

The Residential School System was created by the federal government to assimilate Aboriginal people into the dominant white Eurocentric culture. It was meant to move Aboriginals from being savages to civilized citizens (Milloy, 1999). In his book,

“A National Crime”: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986, Milloy described the relationship between the government and the Residential School system. The title itself presents Milloy's judgement on Residential Schooling. Hundreds of people were involved with the Government over the period of 1879 to 1986 who turned a blind eye or believed the Residential Schools were meant to turn the savages into civilized white people. It is shocking that it took the government over 125 years to apologize and to try to make amends for all the wrongs they caused to the majority of the Aboriginal population as a result of the Residential Schools. Milloy argued that during the 19th and 20th centuries, there existed a belief that Aboriginal people were inferior to Europeans that motivated the federal government to “solve the 'Indian problem'.” This was done through the destruction of Aboriginal culture and traditional ways of life (Chrisjohn, Young and Mauraun, 2006).

The stated intent was to “Kill the Indian in him and save the man” and “it is to the young that we must look for the complete change of condition” (Milloy, 1999, p.27). It was meant to bring the advantages of Christian civility to the Aboriginal people, who were deemed as unsophisticated “savages.”

In 1920, an amendment was made to the Indian Act to have all native children between ages seven to fifteen, attend a Residential School. According to the former Department of Indian Residential School Resolution Canada, there were approximately 132 Residential Schools across Canada, except for Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Newfoundland, (Department of Indian & Northern Affairs, 2003, as cited in Milloy, 1999). Milloy, (1996) clearly stated that:

Federal policy since Confederation, and what it would remain for many decades, was a policy of assimilation, a policy designed to move Aboriginal communities

from their savage state to that of civilization and thus to make in Canada but one community; a non-Aboriginal one. At the core of the policy was education. In the education of the young lay the most potent power to effect cultural change - a power to be channelled through schools and, in particular, through Residential Schools.....Aboriginal knowledge and skills had enabled the newcomers to find their way, to survive and to prosper. But they were now merely historic; they were not to be any part of the future as Canadians pictured it at the founding of their new nation in 1867. That future was one of settlement, agriculture, manufacturing, order, lawfulness and Christianity. In the view of politicians and civil servants in Ottawa whose gaze was fixed upon the horizon of national development, Aboriginal knowledge and skills were neither necessary or desirable in a land that was to be dominated by European industry and, therefore, by Europeans and their culture.

Chrisjohn et al (2006) are correct when they stress that these Residential Schools were less aberrations from the policy mainstream of an otherwise compassionate federal government than they were typical of the government's purpose to reduce and ultimately eliminate status Indians as a distinct social group. What these authors term genocide, however, is more often labeled cultural assimilation by other scholars. Regardless of the label, in 1920, the Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs said, 'there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department' (Department of Indian & Northern Affairs, 2003, as cited in Milloy, 1999).

Between 1843 and 1986, it was estimated that roughly 100,000 students attended Residential Schools. Government policy mandated that Aboriginal children be taught the English or French language, Euro-Canadian ways, and Christian religious practices. These policies were implemented in ways to eradicate Aboriginal language, culture, and religious practices (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006).

There is evidence to suggest that 140 years of social strategies aimed at segregation, assimilation, and integration of Aboriginal children into Eurocentric

mainstream culture have resulted in personal, community and family trauma passed on from generation to generation (Menzie, 2006).

A Shuswap Elder described the ritual of children entering Residential Schools:

At the mission, the truck backed-up and off we went. Right away, boys were separated from girls. We were lined up, sat on chairs, and had our long, beautiful braided hair chopped off. We were thrown into the shower, then had DDT sprinkled hair and all over. It stunk. They gave me a number 79. My name was gone. I was only a number now. We all had the same little bundle of clothing, pinafores, black clothes, socks. You couldn't tell one kid from the other; they transformed individuals into a group. I don't understand how my Shuswap language was turned into English in just one day (Snow, 1999).

There are approximately 80,000 Residential School survivors living today and about 90 percent of the current Aboriginal population is affected at some level by the Residential School process (Inmate management system snapshot, CSC, 2008). Although the Residential School system no longer exists in Canada, the legacy lives on in the form of significant pain and suffering among survivors and their families (Barton et al, 2005).

The food at many schools was rotten and malnourishment, hunger, inadequate clothing, and poorly heated buildings were common. Many children report receiving inadequate medical attention when ill or injured. The dependence of funding on full enrolments encouraged Residential School administrators to admit ill children - a practice which exposed previously healthy children to infection. Many Aboriginal children at the schools became seriously ill; e.g., one well-publicized report noted that 25 percent of students died during outbreaks of tuberculosis (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, pp. 356-357).

In the 1940s, the Residential Schools began to close down because of poor financial management, inadequate living conditions, and Aboriginal parents voicing their frustration over the strict treatment their children endured. The majority of these schools

were eventually replaced by the child welfare system considered to be the new instrument of the government's assimilation policies (Milloy, 1999).

Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma has been described by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) as:

Intergenerational or multi-generational trauma happens when the effects of trauma are not resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next. What we learn to see as "normal", when we are children, we pass on to our own children. Children who learn that physical and sexual abuse is "normal", and who have never dealt with the feelings that come from this, may inflict physical abuse and sexual abuse on their own children. The unhealthy ways of behaving that people use to protect themselves can be passed on to children, without them even knowing they are doing so (cited in Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004, p. 2).

In determining why there is an over-representation of Aboriginals in the prison system an understanding of the horrendous conditions and treatment suffered by the Aboriginal people at Residential Schools is a must. It is these conditions and negative treatments that produce intergenerational trauma. Even though all Residential Schools finally closed down, it took about 50 years for the last one to close in Saskatchewan in 1996, which makes it a very recent experience for many Residential School survivors (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005). As one survivor indicated "The boarding school (Residential) taught us violence." Violence was emphasized through physical, corporal punishment, strapping, beatings, bruising and control. We learned to understand this violence was about power and control (Stonefish, 2007, p. 16).

In the last 15 years, the notion of intergenerational trauma as an explanation for the many social conditions that exist within Aboriginal communities is put forward by a number of researchers working with indigenous communities around the world. Stonefish

(2007) describes and explains how intergenerational trauma resulting from the Residential School and child welfare systems plays a major role in Aboriginal offenders becoming incarcerated because of negative lasting impacts upon their learning, education and family.

Stonefish (2007) stated that intergenerational trauma occurs when these negative abuses are not resolved within a generation. Children who learn that physical, sexual and mental abuses are “normal” and have not dealt with these issues are more likely to continue the abuse with their children. It is important to recognize this abuse, learn how to heal from the past in order to break this intergenerational cycle. This is the legacy of physical and sexual abuse from Residential Schools. Psychologists have also coined the term “Residential School syndrome” associated with the sexual, physical and mental abuses suffered by survivors (Stonefish, 2007).

Residential School survivors suffer from low self-esteem, alcoholism, somatic disorders, violent tendencies, and other symptoms of psychological distress (Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 2006). These conditions, along with violent tendencies and negative attitudes developed towards authority figures may contribute to Aboriginal peoples' involvement in situations that lead to arrest and incarceration. Some report being re-victimized by domestic violence or became, themselves, abusers of their partners, children or parents (Stonefish, 2007).

In the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) Final report (2006, p.8), it noted the following numbers related to those Aboriginal people affected by intergenerational trauma:

Approximately 86,000* Survivors are alive today:	Approximately 287,350* intergenerational impacted (on- and off- reserve):
First Nations –80%** Métis – 9%** Inuit – 5%** non-status – 6%**	Total conservative estimate = 373,350 Estimated 204,564 participants in AHF-funded healing projects*** Only 33% engaged in prior healing activity 49,095 participants in AHF funded training projects***

* Extrapolated figures based on information from the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada’s analysis of Aboriginal Peoples Survey 1991.

** Extrapolated figures from Indian Residential Schools (IRS) Data Project (1998) prepared by DIAND IRS Data Task Group.

*** Extrapolated figures based on information from 2000, 2002 and 2004 AHF surveys.

Previous research studies have revealed that Residential School syndrome has been associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD describes a type of anxiety disorder that can appear after a traumatic event. Traumatic events could have included rape, child neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse at these Residential Schools. Many Aboriginal people who have attended the Residential Schools report having PTSD as a result of the abuses they suffered (Menzie, 2006). Menzie (2006) in his article, entitled, “Intergenerational trauma and homeless Aboriginal Men” demonstrated

that PTSD diagnosis fails to consider the historic and cultural experiences of Aboriginal people in Canada.

Menzie (2006) revealed that the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse suffered by many children including over 100,000 Residential School survivors is well documented by the Assembly of First Nations (1994) and the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (1996). Aboriginal survivors describe the culture of violence as one where the crimes committed are internalized and considered a normal part of life. Much of the family violence, alcoholism, and suicidal behavior amongst Aboriginal people have a direct or indirect relationship to the abuse suffered by Aboriginal students at the Residential Schools. Many Aboriginal offenders are caught up in a vicious cycle of traumatic events and it is very difficult for them to break free of this cycle. Perhaps this is why so many Aboriginal offenders become incarcerated time and time again.

Martel and Brassard (2008) in their article entitled, "Painting the Prison Red" point out that Aboriginals make up the most over-represented incarcerated group compared to other nationalities. They state the over-incarceration is a result of the consequences of the loss of identity that Aboriginals experience because of colonization.

Martel and Brassard (2008) confirm how the Residential School system was used as a primary tool for the assimilation of Aboriginals when they explain how Aboriginals possess a well documented history of social and economic disadvantage, particularly relating to employment and educational attainment, which is linked to significant social problems such as family violence, substance abuse, and low self esteem. These circumstances are responsible for the over-representation of Aboriginals in the prison systems (Martel & Brassard, 2008).

Child Welfare

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) *Gathering Strength* (1996) stated the following about cross-cultural fostering and adoption with the child welfare system:

The removal of Aboriginal children from their communities through cross-cultural foster placement and adoption is a second major cause of family disruption. Children removed from their families are severed from their roots and grow up not knowing what it is to be Inuit, Metis or a First Nation member. Yet they are set apart from their families and communities by visible difference and often made to feel ashamed of their origins. At the same time, their home communities and extended families are robbed of part of the next generation (RCAP, 1996, as cited in Richard & Nelson, 2007, p.76).

The Government of Canada established a *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* in 1996 to give them direction on how Aboriginal people can better integrate into Canadian society given its historical failures towards the treatment of Aboriginal people. The *Royal Commission* was positioned as a milestone for the federal government's current Aboriginal policy. It provides the context to create a structure to integrate Aboriginals into Canadian society, while providing a basis for Aboriginal self-government, allowing them a similar quality of life to that of other Canadians (Frideres, 1996).

Richard and Nelson (2007) noted many of the Aboriginal youth involved with the child welfare system tend to return back to their birth families pending potential barriers created by authorities. This system attempts to prevent or disconnect Aboriginal youth from their birth families so that they become better acquainted with foster or future adoptive families. The majority of Aboriginal youth within the child welfare system were adopted or fostered by white Christian families, further disconnecting them from their

culture and traditions, which had a direct impact on their identities as they grew into adulthood.

The child welfare system can be compared to the Residential Schools in the following ways: foster families do not speak Aboriginal languages and the families are mostly Christian. Foster families don't teach Aboriginal spirituality, ceremonies and encourage youth to honor their ancestries. Aboriginal youth are over-represented in the child welfare system and tend to become over-represented in the prison systems, moving from one residence to the next (Richard & Nelson, 2007).

When representatives, who sat on the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* visited the Saskatchewan Penitentiary in Prince Albert, they met with the members of the Native Brotherhood - the Aboriginal people incarcerated there. Information provided during the visit indicated that 95 percent of the Aboriginal inmates in the penitentiary had either been in foster care or in group homes (RCAP, 1996).

Kirmayer, Simpson and Cargo (2003) noted that the apprehension of Aboriginal children by the child welfare system is similar to that of the Residential School System. Johnston introduced the phrase "sixties scoop" to identify the overwhelming number of Aboriginal children removed from their families and communities by child and welfare authorities (Johnston, 1983, as cited in Menzie, 2006, p.4). Blackstock and Trocme (2005) estimated that over 40 percent of the 76,000 children and youth not living with their families (in foster or group homes) in Canada are Aboriginal and that there are three times more Aboriginal children in care of child welfare authorities now than in the Residential Schools at the height of those operations in the 1940s.

The child and welfare authorities, in the mid 1950s to early 1970s assumed that Aboriginal parents could not provide appropriate homes for their children and Aboriginal communities were considered unhealthy (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005).

Trevethan, Auger, and Moore (2001) found the majority of Aboriginal offenders compared to non-Aboriginal offenders were involved in the child welfare system as children. The study confirmed that many Aboriginal offenders had a more extensive criminal history and a less stable childhood compared to non-Aboriginal offenders - one fifth of the Aboriginals reported attending Residential School. The Aboriginal offenders described their experiences as very negative and many suffered physical and sexual abuse. During the interview portion of the study, Aboriginal offenders showed a desire for the next generation of children to experience better lives. The Aboriginal offenders revealed that it was rare for someone to ask them questions related to their childhood experiences. It was interesting to note that 83 percent of the Aboriginal participants in the study were involved in spiritual and cultural services in the prison (Trevethan, Auger, & Moore, 2001). They felt attached to their culture and being involved with the spiritual ceremonies provided a sense of belonging. Fortunately, many Aboriginal offenders get reconnected with their culture; however this often only occurs upon incarceration. Many of these Aboriginal offenders have lost their language, culture, and identity by growing up in the Residential Schools, foster homes, or through being adopted by non-Aboriginal families.

Telling Stories

Historically Aboriginal people have always taught their tradition, ceremonies and culture through oral history and storytelling. This oral history is and was used as a tool

for personal healing. Storytelling was a social institution, an “oral university” that taught people young and old about being “human” that is, how to function in the community. Traditional oral stories capture beliefs and guiding principles of personal behavior that are used today as they were in our past history (Cruikshank, 1990). This oral history has been passed from generation to generation throughout Aboriginal communities.

I have participated in sharing and talking circles, where one person would pass the feather and share what is on their mind. This type of sharing of personal stories is a very powerful and simple tool, which is used by many Elders working in the prison systems.

Aboriginal learning can be found in talking or sharing circles, participant’s observation, experiential learning, modelling, mediation, prayer, ceremonies or storytelling as a way of knowing and learning (Battiste, 2002). The stories we tell about our small or big personal experiences help us return to moments that make us who we are, to search for an answer or reason and repeat its meaning to ourselves or others. Stories that remain as true to their origins as possible are usually ones that are fundamental to the teachings, ceremonies, and way of life of Aboriginals.

The stories share the teaching, history, culture and way of life for Aboriginal people. In the Pulitzer Prize Poet, Lisel Mueller’s poem “Why we tell stories?”(1980), a verse states we tell stories “because the story of our life becomes our life. Because each one of us tells the same story but tells it differently and none of us tells it the same way twice....” We all live through our stories and the stories live through us (Maclean & Wason-Ellam, 1980, p.9).

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is an example of a group which allows people to gather, listen and share their own stories. People attend AA meetings in hope of learning

from others. In addition, they may realize that they are not the only person with an addiction problem. The sharing one's stories with others may take a person who is suffering due to isolation to a place of healing through friendship and understanding. AA and its founders believed in personal narratives and attest to a strong belief in the power of storytelling and open confession in the healing process (Porter, n.d.).

Storytelling and hearing the Aboriginal offender's voice can serve as a powerful learning tool because it provides an opportunity to listen to these participants and learn how they came to be incarcerated and involved with the criminal justice system.

Personal storytelling changes the described experience from that of one expert opinion to many voices of expertise and accuracy. In the case of this research the Aboriginal participants are considered the "experts", as it is their stories we want to listen to and hopefully learn from. Listening to the participants' stories, particularly what brought them to prison allows us the opportunity to learn from their situation and experiences.

How can it be possible where two groups of society view government policies such as the Residential School and child welfare system, and have such different beliefs or opinions on these matters? The dominant group might look at both of these systems as half full and beneficial but to Aboriginal people it would be half empty and destructive. Having these participants tell their stories about why they view the system as half empty and destructive is a reason for us to listen and learn why that is the case.

The use of story not only validates the participant's experience, but also gives them authority over that experience, a place where they are knowledgeable and others can learn from them. In this study, many of the Aboriginal participants are learning about

their teachings, culture, and spirituality by listening to the Elders. They may not realize it, but the participants now have shared their own story for other's to learn from them.

These stories are the Aboriginal participants' voices about their own experiences. They have a rich connection to who they are as Aboriginals since these stories are an important component of Aboriginal identity. This storytelling by the Elders and personal stories of the participants should be considered sacred.

It is hoped that Aboriginal youth will hear these stories of the incarcerated Aboriginal participants and later on in life, tell a different story of their life. Can offenders help young people, to keep them from an unhealthy life? A former inmate said it best: *"We've lived it. We've felt it. We've seen it. We can relate."*

In summing up the history of Aboriginal people in Canada since contact, the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba said: "Aboriginal peoples have experienced the most entrenched racial discrimination of any group in Canada. Discrimination against Aboriginal people has been a central policy of Government of Canada since Confederation (Rudin, 2009).

The over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in the CSC's prisons is a result of historical factors related to the Residential School and child welfare systems. This study will examine and capture the personal stories and perspectives of six Aboriginal offenders with the intent of answering the following four questions:

1. What experiences do Aboriginal offenders feel contributed to their incarceration?
2. What do Aboriginal offenders feel could have prevented their incarceration?
3. How do Aboriginal offenders describe their experiences with Residential Schools, with child welfare systems and intergenerational trauma?

4. What are the Aboriginal offenders' perspectives on their experiences with the CSC's healing/intervention programs?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This is a qualitative research study which involved Aboriginal offenders at a Federal institution in the Ontario Region. Qualitative research was chosen because it created an opportunity for the researcher to engage in an exploration of the perceptions and experiences of the Aboriginal offenders referred to in this study. Berg (2004) stated that researchers who use qualitative techniques examine how people learn about and make sense of themselves and others. Colaizzi (1978) mentioned that a fundamental activity of being human is to understand and draw meaning from personal experience.

In interviewing Aboriginal offenders about their experiences, the goal was to understand the personal meanings that these offenders created from their own experiences of Residential Schools, of the child welfare system, and of intergenerational trauma. The interest was in tapping into the Aboriginal offenders' personal experiences, perceptions, thoughts and feelings leading to their incarceration. A qualitative research methodology was deemed to be most suitable with this kind of research goal.

Setting

I received written permission to conduct this study both from the Warden of the Institution where the study took place, and from the Acting Regional Administrator of Aboriginal Initiatives, CSC. After receiving ethical clearance from Queen's University, I communicated with a Research Analyst from National Headquarters, CSC, Research Branch to ensure that CSC's research procedures were being followed. I then invited the Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) and Elder at this Institution to be involved with this study because they had working experience with these offenders. The offenders might

feel more comfortable having familiar faces as part of the study enabling them to perhaps be more open and honest with their provided responses.

Participants

The participants were recruited from the introduction meeting and they volunteer after listening to the ARA as well as reading the recruitment letter which explained the rationale for the research study. The descriptions of the participants are solely based on the information they provided in their one-on-one interviews with the ARA.

Participant A is a status Aboriginal person and 55 years old. He is a direct survivor of the Residential School system and is currently serving a lengthy federal sentence. As a child, he grew up in other relative's homes.

Participant B is a status Aboriginal person and was involved with the foster care system and lived in a group home. His biological mother had attended the Residential School system.

Participant C is a status Aboriginal person and 42 years old. He lived with his grandmother at age three, as his father was not around during his childhood. Both, his father and grandmother attended the Residential schools.

Participant Q is a status Aboriginal person and 23 years old. At age three, the foster care system took him away from his family. He was a crown ward of the child welfare system.

Participant T is a status Aboriginal person and 26 years old. Grandfather attended the Residential school system, but he never spoke about it. Participant T's father left him, when he was just a young child.

Participant I is an Inuk person and 37 years old. Most of his childhood was spent in a hospital located in Edmonton, Alberta. He believed that his father attended a Residential School. Participant I lived in a foster home when he was not in the hospital.

Aboriginal Case Management Team

The Aboriginal Case Management Team consisted of the ALO and the Elder. The researcher asked both of these individuals, if they would be willing to assist in this study, in addition to their current duties at the Institution. Both of these individuals agreed and were willing to work it into their schedule. Through their combined 40 years of experience working with Aboriginal offenders at Federal Institutions, these individuals have acquired a wealth of knowledge about Aboriginal culture, ceremonies and spirituality. Both of these individuals are Aboriginal. They have also undergone extensive training at the CSC Staff College on working with Aboriginal offenders. The ALO and the Elder have personal experiences with Residential Schools, which enable them to bring a unique perspective and understanding to this research study. In the context of their work with CSC, the role of the ALO and the Elder is to provide one-on-one and group counseling to Aboriginal offenders. They assist parole officers with case management issues and act as a liaison between the Aboriginal offender and members from Aboriginal communities coordinating the offender's rehabilitation and release planning. The ALO also arranges and organizes a meeting place within the Institution for community members to visit with the Aboriginal offenders. As in the case of this research study, the ALO had arranged two different rooms, one for the introduction meeting and the other for the one-on-one interviews.

Aboriginal Research Assistant (ARA)

The research assistant was purposely selected by the researcher for this study. The researcher had discussed this study with the Aboriginal person who volunteered to conduct these one-on-one interviews and introduction meeting. The ARA was an Aboriginal person who had a wealth of personal and professional experience relating to the information that was being sought in this research study. The ARA had a neutral position because he was not an employee of CSC. Although he had previously worked for CSC as a program facilitator, he had never worked at the institution where this research study was conducted. He was chosen because he has the necessary education, skills and professional experience to facilitate these one-on-one interviews. It was crucial to choose a neutral research assistant who was not working with CSC in order to avoid any power differences between the research assistant and Aboriginal offenders.

The researcher ensured that the ARA was aware of the arrangements for the information meeting and interviews. These interviews were conducted by the ARA, who did not disclose the names of the Aboriginal offenders to the researcher. Given the anonymity of the offenders, and the fact that the ARA could have no influence on their cases it is reasonable to expect that the participants could be relatively open and truthful during the interview phase of this research study.

Recruitment of Aboriginal Offenders

The Aboriginal offenders were invited to participate in an information meeting about the study. Approximately 23 Aboriginal offenders were invited to attend the information meeting. Prior to that meeting, the Aboriginal Liaison Officer gave the Aboriginal offenders letters which described this research study and invited them to

participate in it. The Aboriginal offenders were advised that an Elder, who works at their Institution, had volunteered and would be made available to offer counseling and healing in response to the sensitive issues that could arise in the course of the study. In addition, CSC had psychologists and chaplains available to offer counseling and assistance to Aboriginal offenders in response to their personal issues. The ARA explained the purpose of the research study and processes involved in the one-on-one interviews. The ARA informed the participants that the research findings will be shared with CSC to improve programs and reintegration tools/supports towards Aboriginal offenders. In cases where an Aboriginal offender had literacy difficulties, the ALO assisted the offender in completing the consent form.

Interviews

The one-on-one interviews were guided by a prepared list of questions, which were shared with the ARA and ALO prior to the interviews themselves. The intent was to follow the ‘general interview guide approach’ described by Patton (2002) whereby “an interview guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed”. The interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject (Patton, p. 343).

An opportunity was provided for the Elder to review the findings. The ARA also advised the prospective participants that the researcher was an Aboriginal Community Development Officer working for Aboriginal Initiatives, Regional Headquarters, CSC, as well as a full-time Masters of Education student at Queen's University. The main researcher was not present during the information meeting or the one-on-one interviews.

He would only access the transcriptions of the interviews. The ARA responded to any questions or concerns that the participants had about this study.

At the information meeting, the ARA explained to the participants that they could choose to leave during the information meeting if they decided at any point that they did not want to participate. Each participant consented to be part of the research study, by signing a consent form. Each participant was also given a letter of the alphabet to serve as a code in replacing their name for the one-on-one interviews.

After the information meeting, the Aboriginal offenders were contacted individually either by the ARA or ALO to advise them of the mutually agreed upon schedule of one-on-one interviews. CSC's protocol regarding offender movement was followed in arranging for offenders to attend their interviews for this research study. The researcher ensured that the ARA understood the research protocol for distributing and collecting the Letter of Information and Consent Form. The researcher also educated and prepared the ARA for the interview process. The one-on-one interviews were digitally recorded by the ARA. During the interviews, the Aboriginal inmates provided only their letter of the alphabet to identify themselves. The main goal of the one-on-one interview was to capture the Aboriginal offender's experiences and perceptions related to their incarceration.

In order to further protect the anonymity of the Aboriginal participants, the researcher hired a transcriber. The ARA deleted any identifying data through which the Aboriginal offender could have been identified (including names of places and names of people). The main researcher was unable to identify any of the participants in this research study. The researcher received the transcripts from the ARA to analyze the data

and search for stories capturing the depth of the experiences leading to the Aboriginal offenders' incarcerations. This insight was meant to provide a rich description of experiences potentially related to the overrepresentation and incarceration of Aboriginal offenders.

For example, these varied experiences included, family dysfunction, peer pressure, poverty and substance abuse. I have included numerous stories as needed to reflect the rich descriptions of offenders' experiences.

The criteria for selecting the most relevant stories to analyze and share include: direct or familial Residential School experiences and/or involvement with the child welfare system (Milloy, 1999; Stonefish, 2007).

At the end of the one-on-one interview, Aboriginal offenders were thanked for their participation in this research study. They were also made aware of the availability of the Elder to offer counseling or support to discuss any issues that may have arisen during the interview. After that point there was no further collection of data.

Course of Action

I received written permission to conduct this study from both the Warden of the Federal Institution and Acting Regional Administrator of Aboriginal Initiatives, CSC. I then received ethical clearance from Queen's University. Upon receiving ethical clearance, I then received research approval from National Headquarters, CSC, Research Branch to conduct this study.

Data Collection

On January 14, 2010, the main researcher had met with the ARA, the ALO and the Elder to provide explanations and an update about the research study. This meeting

discussed having the interviews in the morning and early afternoon. These interview timeframes were selected because there was a full complement of staff available to provide support and services to the participants, if they needed to speak to an Elder or psychologist) after participating in the one-on-one interviews. The ALO mentioned that in another federal institution a sweat lodge was conducted on a Friday night. After the sweat lodge was finished, one of the Aboriginal offenders harmed himself as a result of the sensitive information discussed in the sweat lodge. There are fewer staff, resources and support services, combined with increased free time for offenders on weekends, and this contributed to the incident of self-harm. This incident reinforces the importance of conducting one-on-one interviews during the morning or early afternoon on weekdays.

The ARA was provided the procedures and safeguards about conducting the interviews within the institution. Before each interview, the ARA stated the time, date and identity of the person being interviewed by their letter provided to them at the information session. It was ensured that the ARA check and remind each participant about the availability to discuss any issues with the Elder or one of the CSC staff if they felt it was necessary after these interviews.

The main researcher and the ARA discussed data collection procedures, including the means through which data would be kept secure and protected. These procedures were as follows: the ARA was given a digital recorder for the one-on-one interview. The ARA was told that after each day of interviewing, he should ensure that he saves these digitally recorded interviews onto a secure hard drive, in order to ensure that there is another copy in case the digital recorder is broken, destroyed, or lost.

The main researcher contacted the security department at Regional Headquarters, CSC to ensure the proper identification card was completed for the ARA so that he could conduct the information session and interviews at the Federal Institution. The main researcher emailed the Warden of the institution to inform him of the dates and times of when the information session and interviews will occur.

On January 26, 2010, the main researcher met with the ALO at the federal institution where the one-on-one interviews were to occur. The purpose of this meeting was to review the Invitation (Recruitment) Letter with the ALO. The ALO ensured that all Aboriginal Offenders at this institution received a copy of the Letter of Invitation which invited them to attend the information session for this research study.

On February 3, 2010, the main researcher received permission from the Director of Research, Research Branch, CSC to begin this research study at the chosen federal institution. The Warden and his manager were also advised that my research was beginning. The main researcher e-mailed the ALO on the morning of February 10, 2010, to inform him that the information session would be taking place. He also asked the ALO to distribute the Invitation (Recruitment) Letters to all Aboriginal offenders at the Institution. The ARA was also advised of the date and time of the Information Meeting.

On February 4, 2010, the main researcher met with the ALO to discuss the upcoming Information Meeting and the location for the one-on-one interviews. The offenders' anonymity and privacy were two prime considerations. We decided that it was essential to create an interview environment that was familiar and non-threatening for the offenders. In order to create this environment, we agreed that the integrity of the space to

be used had to be maintained. In other words, we had to restrict any unusual presence from disrupting the normal, expected sense of place.

The main researcher explained to the ARA that consent forms had to be completed by the offenders prior to their participation in this research study. He also explained that participants were to be given an alphabetical letter to replace their names. The offenders were to be reminded that their alphabetical letter would be used in their one-on-one interview, instead of their names.

On February 5, 2010, the main researcher gave the ARA paper copies of the consent form. The ARA was told to ensure that at the end of the Information Meeting, he was to collect signed consent forms from all those who agreed to participate in the study. The ARA was provided with a digital recorder, and given instructions as to how it worked. The ARA already had a good understanding of how the digital recorder worked because he had used one before in a previous research work.

On February 10, 2010, the main researcher met with the ARA to review the expectations for the Information Meeting. The main researcher told the ARA that a Correctional Officer would escort him to where this Information Meeting took place. The security procedures were reviewed with the ARA for his safety prior to the Information Meeting. The main researcher decided with the ALO and ARA to have the interviews occur on Monday, February 15 to Friday, February 19, 2010. There were to be two interviews conducted daily, one at 09:00 and the other at 13:30.

On February 10, 2010, the ARA met with the Aboriginal offenders and discussed this research study. After the Information Meeting, the ARA met with the main researcher and explained the offenders had not been made aware of the purpose of the

meeting. These offenders were frustrated because of this lack of information. Apparently, the ALO had not distributed the Invitation (Recruitment) letter as instructed, but instead had relied on another CSC employee to distribute the letters. It appeared that only a few of the Aboriginal offenders had received the letter and the rest had not. At the Information Meeting, the ARA did explain the purpose of the meeting. He also advised the Aboriginal offenders that this miscommunication would be fixed and proper arrangements would be made to hold another Information Meeting. The Aboriginal offenders accepted this explanation and will attend another meeting.

On February 12, 2010, the main researcher spoke with the ALO and ARA to arrange to have another information meeting on February 15, 2010 at 0930. The ALO distributed the recruitment letters for the Aboriginal offenders. The Elder and ALO were in an adjacent office while the ARA conducted this information session.

On February 15, 2010, the ARA met with the Aboriginal offenders - nine Aboriginal offenders attended the Information Meeting. The ARA explained the purpose of the research study and answered questions from the Aboriginal offenders. The ARA then asked the Aboriginal offenders who would like to participate in the study. Six Aboriginal offenders consented to participate in the study. The ARA thanked all the Aboriginal offenders for participating in the Information Meeting. The ARA had the six Aboriginal offenders sign a consent form to participate in the one-on-one interviews. These offenders were advised that the interviews would begin in the next few days. The ARA set up these one-on-one interviews and individual memos were distributed by the ALO to inform the Aboriginal offenders of the exact scheduled times.

The ARA raised a concern with the main researcher over bringing in the digital recorder into the Federal Institution. The ARA wanted to ensure he was able to bring this device into the institution without any difficulties from the Correctional Officers. The main researcher contacted the Deputy Warden of the Institution for him to place a front gate memo advising the Correctional Officers that the ARA would be bringing in a digital recorder for the one on one interview purposes.

On February 16, 2010, the ARA managed to conduct three one-on-one interviews for this study. On February 17, 2010, the ARA interviewed only one Aboriginal offender as an institutional security incident prevented the second interview from occurring. On February 18, 2010, the ARA completed the last two interviews with the Aboriginal participants. All of these interviews were approximately one hour in length.

The main researcher and the ARA discussed the interviews. The ARA said it was difficult scheduling these interviews as a result of the programs and activities of the institution. All of the Aboriginal participants answered the questions in the one-on-one interview. The ARA mentioned there was only one participant out of the six that provided limited answers. The ARA believe this particular Aboriginal offender was abiding by the so called "offender code" and thinks that other offenders influenced his responses. Offender code means that they follow certain rules establish by other offenders, these rules are unwritten and not necessary in agreement with correctional officials.

On February 19, 2010, the transcriber was contacted by the ARA and the data was passed onto her for transcription. The researcher made prior arrangements with the ARA to have him drop off the recorded interviews to the transcriber.

On February 26, 2010, the transcriber indicated that it took almost forty hours to transcribe the data. The finished transcriptions were given to the ARA, who reviewed and removed any identifying information of the Aboriginal offenders. The recorded data on the digital recorder was then passed back to the ARA. The ARA removed any identifying information from the digital recorder and immediately uploaded to his computer. The Aboriginal identities are kept confidential and the letters of the alphabet are used to replace the names of these participants in this research.

After reviewing and removing any identifying information by the ARA, the transcriptions were passed onto the researcher for his analysis of the data.

Analysis

The researcher received the edited audio format from the ARA and listened to each interview three times in order to become familiar with the data, and to search for mistakes in the transcriptions. The researcher also read the written format of the transcriptions and highlighted data that was related to the research questions, and to the participants' experiences. The data collected during the interviews was analyzed to look for emerging themes. A code was applied to particular segments of text that pointed to factors leading to incarceration. The data analysis highlights Aboriginal offenders' perspectives and experiences that have led to their incarceration.

Reliability and Validity

As the main researcher, I analyzed the data from the one-on-one interviews. I used cross case analysis to validate the findings in this research study. I assigned a color code to each theme that arose from each participant. I grouped together these answers from the Aboriginal participants to common interview questions. I shared the color-coded themes

with the ARA, who verified and agreed with the themes as derived from the interviews. The ARA used an interview format predominated by open-ended questions which facilitated cross-case or cross-interview analysis for each question in the interview (Patton, 2002).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of my study was to illuminate the Aboriginal offenders' perspectives on their experiences that led to their incarceration. My study provided an opportunity for the Aboriginal offenders to share their experiences from their past that brought them to prison. The major research questions guiding this study include: 1. What experiences do Aboriginal offenders feel contributed to their incarceration? 2. What do Aboriginal offenders feel could have prevented their incarceration? 3. How do Aboriginal offenders describe their experiences with the Residential School and child welfare systems? 4. What are the Aboriginal offenders' perspectives on their experiences with CSC's healing and intervention programs? This study hopes to contribute to improving CSC programs for helping Aboriginal offenders become law abiding citizens. To address the four questions, my research study used data from interviews, which involved face-to-face interviews with six Aboriginal offenders. The data collected from these interviews were thoroughly reviewed to identify common themes.

The participants in this research were imprisoned at a medium security penitentiary located in the Ontario Region. This is a Federal Institution where inmates serve out their term of incarceration. In order to receive a federal sentence, an inmate will be given a term of imprisonment of two years plus a day by a Judge. All the participants described themselves as being status Aboriginals except for one, who is Inuk. CSC has developed a profile of a typical Aboriginal offender, and the six research participants matched that profile. The majority of the participants in this study had the following attributes and experiences:

- poor quality and brief education;
- few employment skills;
- exposure to family violence or other forms of violence growing up;
- lifelong poverty;
- backgrounds with dysfunctional families.

Other studies (Braun, 1998; Waldram, 1997; Welsh & Ogloff, 2008) on Aboriginal offenders have produced similar findings to this study; however, there have not been many studies that have captured the Aboriginal offender's voices to learn from their personal experience and how this led to their federal incarcerated sentence. All of the participants shared similar stories about their path towards incarceration and provided suggestions on how to improve the circumstances of Aboriginal offenders within the criminal justice system. All of the participants provided personal experiences related to the Residential Schools and/or the child welfare system. Participant perceptions of their experiences with the Residential Schools and the child welfare system are the two initial themes to be discussed. The other themes that appeared from the data were poverty, substance abuse, violence and abuse, previous incarceration, lack of education, Aboriginal programs, Aboriginal culture, beliefs about prevention, community involvement and change of attitude. The participants have provided their own comments on each theme as it related to their personal experiences throughout this chapter.

Residential Schools

One of my research questions asked how the Residential School System experiences affect Aboriginal people who are incarcerated. One recent report on the Residential School effects is worth quoting at length:

The historical trauma that affected Aboriginal people in North America did not stop with the epidemics. It did not stop with the invaders taking away Aboriginal lands. It did not stop with the missionaries taking away Aboriginal belief systems. Another type of cultural genocide was attempted from the 1880s to 1950s—the period known as the Residential School era. Much has already been written about this new brutal form of colonial control. To summarize briefly: First Nation children were removed from their families and sent to schools operated by missionaries and later by the Government of Canada. The forceful removal of children from their families was, at that time, a lawful governmental practice intended to destroy Aboriginal social and cultural identity (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004: 52, as cited in Bracken, Deane and Morrisette, 2009).

In the following paragraphs, participants from this study will provide their own experiences related to the Residential School System.

In this research study, Participant A was a direct survivor of the Residential School. He was negatively impacted by having to live in the Residential School as a child. As illustrated in the next sentence, he provided some powerful descriptions in terms of the conditions and treatment he had endured at the Residential School.

Participant A recited “Feeling suppressed, depressed state of mind, hidden madness, shyness, starvation as a child, whipped for not cleaning floor properly, damage stays with you.”

In June 1940, a prominent Aboriginal person, Malcolm Norris, who worked for the newspaper, *Indian Speaking Leaf*, wrote:

The conditions at these schools are common knowledge. Inferior staff, inadequate food, constant overwork, military and religious routine, together with genuine cruelty, have caused those who have attended them to term these schools “Penitentiaries”(Norris, 1940, cited in Milloy, 1998, p.191).

Participant A supports what Malcolm Norris had written in the above paragraph by stating “Abuse that took place at the Residential School, did a lot of damage to me. Put in Residential School for four and half to five years. A lot of us guys had followed that trait of abuse and tried to hold that inside the way we were treated. We act out on it

in fear, anger and depression. Tried to hide abuse of what happened to us, using alcohol, drugs....”

Many Aboriginal children that lived in Residential Schools became the housekeepers and servants for the priests and nurses - washing floors, sewing and mending clothing and textiles, preparing food, cleaning toilets, dusting, and polishing (Richardson & Nelson, 2007).

Another Participant, who is Inuk and referred to as Participant I, had similar experiences to Participant A. Participant I had lived most of his childhood in a hospital. This hospital could be described as being similar to a Residential School. In the 1950s, the government moved the Inuit into settlements in the North. As a result of these moves, this individual experienced one of the largest tuberculosis outbreaks in history. For example in 1964, over seventy percent of Keewatin Inuit were placed in sanatoriums down south for periods ranging from three months to nine years. (Keewatin describes the area where this particular group of Inuit lived in the north). As a result, these children of the Keewatin Inuit were adopted into southern families without any surviving parents or extended families having given consent or notice (Dickason, 1992, p. 397). Participant I provided personal experience of his departure and life at the hospital in the south. Participant I stated “I had there, foster parents, they were white people, stayed at their house when I was not in the hospital, called them ‘mom and dad’.”

As for the other participants, three of the six participants had parents who attended the Residential School system. Participant I believed his dad might have gone to Residential School and stated “he went to some kind of school, driving tractors, he learned that from somewhere and he had a number.” When Aboriginal children, entered

the doors of the Residential School for the first time, all of them were assigned a number to replace their Aboriginal name.

Participant B is aware of the negative effects the Residential School had upon his mother, as he described “I know my mom has hard feelings for that kind of stuff. So I think she’s been through a lot.”

Two of the other participants had grandparents who attended Residential School. The majority of participants in this study reported they were affected by Residential Schools. This effect is not only seen directly with survivors of the Residential School, but it has also caused the intergenerational transfer of the trauma suffered by Aboriginal people to their children and grandchildren (Quinn, 2007).

There are studies that present evidence suggesting how intergenerational trauma is passed on from one generation to the next (Milloy, 1999; Wesley-Esquimaux, 2004). As mentioned in the literature review, Stonefish (2007) stated that the intergenerational trauma occurs when negative abuses are not resolved within a given generation. When this trauma is ignored by the survivor, it is passed from one generation to the next. Through this study, it appears that many of the participants are beginning to talk about their past and reveal and resolve some of their own personal trauma. It is important to understand that one cannot address personal issues, unless one begins talking about them, and this study provides the Aboriginal offenders with a platform from which to heal from their past. This healing not only occurs within them, but through this healing; the intergenerational trauma may be prevented from occurring in their children.

Here are a few quotes from the participants in the study that described what they are aware of regarding intergenerational trauma. Participant C stated “they are

traumatized by Residential School and what happened there. Some of those kids, a lot of bad things happened at those schools.” Participant Q reported “yes, my grandfather did. It had effected on my father and then passed onto me.” Participant T described “My grandfather might have, one that passed away. If it affected him, he did not let anyone know it. Never hold a grudge. My dad took off when he was 13 years old and lived on his own for years and came back. My dad got into drugs at a young age.”

Experiences with Residential School may have played a role in Participant T’s father’s leaving home when he was only thirteen years of age and in his involvement in drugs at a young age. As such, Participant T’s father’s experiences with Residential School are a possible reason why Participant T is incarcerated, as he followed a similar path to his father.

The five participants may not have directly connected their incarceration and negative life events to the Residential School System which affected their parents and grandparents. It is only recently that as “intergenerational trauma” has been discussed that many are connecting their parents’, their grandparents’, or their own behaviours to the Residential School system as displayed in this study. On an individual basis, one can attribute someone’s incarceration to poor choices and family dysfunction as being to blame: however, it is not until we start to look at patterns of behaviour among many people that we recognize the underlying reasons for these phenomena.

Participant A did make connections between Residential School and his behaviour. That subject could have been expanded upon to further unravel the connections and factors that lead to incarceration. Are there models of deviance that

illustrate how people progress towards illegal activities but do not care about the consequences as a result of low self-esteem and a history of abuse?

Understanding the circumstances surrounding Aboriginal offenders in the context of intergenerational trauma as a result of the Residential School system is important. This understanding can lead to a better appreciation among people who work within the criminal justice system so they can work more effectively with offenders. By knowing the circumstances of the Aboriginal offenders, “one” or “professionals” can better address some of these issues stemming from intergenerational trauma. By reading Aboriginal offenders’ personal accounts of their experiences with Residential School and the child welfare system, professionals employed by CSC and other professionals will have a better appreciation of the circumstances that lead so many Aboriginal offenders towards incarceration.

Child welfare system

Three of the six participants were involved in the child welfare system. During discussions with these individuals, evidence was gathered that exemplifies how being involved with foster homes or group homes had a negative impact on their lives.

Federal studies found 63 percent of incarcerated Aboriginal offenders were either adopted or involved with foster care. Blackstock & Trocme (2005) reported that First Nations children are six to eight times more likely to be in foster care. This year (2010), 27,500 First Nations children are involved with the child welfare system. Blackstock and Trocme (2005) estimate that there are three times more Aboriginal children in the care of the child welfare authorities now, than there were in the Residential Schools at the height of those operations in 1940s (p.13).

Not only are Aboriginal people over-represented in the child welfare system, but they are also over-represented in the Federal Institutions, moving from one institutional residence (child welfare system) into another (Federal Institutions). Moreover, many Aboriginal offenders' past experiences included moving among three institutional residences: Residential School; foster homes, group homes, adopted homes, and the young offender, provincial and federal prisons. The sad truth is that, many aboriginal children have no understanding of intergenerational trauma and why their families are the way they are. It was only through my professional and education work in my adult life that I made a connection on how the dysfunction, violence and abuse my mother exhibited was a result of her negative experiences suffered while she attended Residential School. She also did not acquire any parenting skills while at this Residential School. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) noted that the effects of intergenerational trauma are experienced by children and grandchildren of Residential School survivors:

The Residential School led to disruption in the transference of parenting skills from one generation to the next. Without these skills, many survivors have had difficulty in raising their own children. In Residential Schools, they learned that adults often exert power and control through abuse. The lessons learned in childhood are often repeated in adulthood with the result that many survivors of the Residential School system often inflict abuse on their own children.

Many children blame themselves for family dysfunction, as well as their own family or community. Many do not connect their individual and family experiences to the Residential Schools and government policies, which affected many Aboriginal families.

In the mid-1980s, the child welfare system acted very much the same as the Residential Schools. The child welfare system did little to recognize the needs of the Aboriginal children and served a role in the fragmentation of the family and community.

Child protection authorities lacked an understanding of cultural and traditional child rearing practices removing children abruptly from their families and communities without consultation. Families and children lost contact with each other as it was assumed white foster or adoptive homes were superior, but many children suffered in many ways while in “care” (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005).

Until the late 1970s, Aboriginal children were routinely sent to adoptive homes in the United States, without the knowledge of the biological parents (Walmsley, 2005). The typical Aboriginal child involved with the child welfare system would live in three to 13 foster homes before the age of 19 (Richardson & Nelson, 2007).

The majority of the Aboriginal offenders in this study were disconnected from their birth family and lived in a relative’s home, group home, foster home or were adopted. It is important to realize how this disconnection from one’s biological family can have a negative effect upon the individual and this is supported by some of the testimony provided by participants B, Q and I. It is these past experiences as a child that have led so many Aboriginal offenders to incarceration, as a young offender, provincial offender and or federal offender. Participant Q supported this by stating, “Tossed around until I was 14 years old, and moved to another off reserve.”

Participant I was not only was disconnected from his family living up north and placed in a southern hospital as a young child from age five to eight years of age, then after suffering through the pain of operations to his clubbed feet, he is now disconnected once again and sent to live with white people who most likely have limited knowledge about his culture, language or background. It makes one wonder what effect this had

upon Participant I and any other child who would have to go through this negative separation, not once but twice, and then try and live a healthy life.

So many other Aboriginal peoples' experienced a similar negative effect as they too were removed from their families and placed in foster homes, group homes or adopted. This is supported by statements made by Participants A, B and Q. Participant B explained "Before school, really young raised in foster home. Didn't have a house, living in a doghouse, raised on the street" Participant Q recalled "I was a Crown Ward, I was stuck in there. A lot of negative experience happened there. I didn't react when I was very young but when I was 11 and 12 years old, I started to rebel in the foster homes. The foster homes couldn't handle me." Participant Q was more explicit and stated "the foster homes were not safe environments." In the first home he and his sister were placed in ended up badly where the sister was sexually violated. Following that, the siblings were separated into different homes.

In this study, there is personal testimony on how the child welfare system played a role in the fragmentation and disconnection of the participants and their families. This might have been a factor in why these participants and other Aboriginal offenders have become incarcerated. Another of the many consequences of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families by the child welfare system was a loss of cultural identity. Not knowing who you are as a person, and losing your self-identity is one of the greatest tragedies a person can face, and leads to so many self-destructive behaviours. A common long-term consequence is incarceration (Milloy, 1999). Participant A supported exactly what Milloy was portraying by stating "Forgets who he is, does what he wants, commits a crime, drinking to cover up his past."

From the accounts of these offenders, it is evident how their experiences with the child welfare system contribute to their incarceration. The participants also identified additional factors that contributed to their incarceration. These factors are poverty, substance abuse, violence, previous incarceration and education.

Poverty

Many Aboriginal offenders come from impoverished backgrounds. Previous studies (Braun, 1998; Waldram, 1997) have indicated that poor socio-economic status during the early years of childhood influences many Aboriginal peoples such that they become involved with the Criminal Justice System. Poverty rates consistently demonstrate Aboriginal children are among the poorest of all Canadians. The Canadian Institute for Health Information (2004) and Health Canada (2000) state that around 33 per cent of First Nations and Inuit people live in inadequate and unaffordable housing, in comparison to 18 percent of non-Aboriginal people (cited in Bracken, Deane & Morrissette, 2009).

RCAP (1996) has suggested that factors associated with poverty have an influence on the over-representation of Aboriginal people among people who are incarcerated. As well, CSC also noted that Aboriginal offenders are more likely than non-Aboriginal offenders to experience poverty. Consequently, the impacts on the country's social economy are tremendous given the large Aboriginal population, which undoubtedly impacts the country's workforce and as a result, the health of the economy. Below are some comments by participants A, B and C, who described different and personal experiences related to poverty. Participant A stated "my mother could not afford to look after us five boys." Participant B stated "didn't have a house, outside buddy, living in a

doghouse.” Participant B lived on the streets most of his childhood. Participant C stated “A lot of poor communities out there. Hold up banks, selling drugs, doing violent crimes, taking care of their families.”

It can be assumed that the other participants, two who were raised by grandparents, the other by a single mother, experienced some degree of poverty related to the descriptions of their childhood which they have provided in this study. Why these participants and so many other Aboriginal children are raised by their Grandparents or relatives has a lot to do with the Residential School and how this system never spoke on how to be a proper parent and offer appropriate parenting skills. Arguably, this limited parenting could also account for why there are so many Aboriginal children placed in the child welfare system.

Substance Abuse

Parental substance abuse

Several studies suggested that alcohol and drug abuse is a common characteristic among the majority of Aboriginal offenders (Bracken, Deane & Morrisette, 2009; Milloy, 1999; Trevethan, Auger & Moore, 2001; Waldram; 1997;). While growing up, many Aboriginal offenders witnessed their parents’ abuse alcohol and drugs. Two participants remembered the impact that alcohol had upon him. Participant Q stated “Two or three years old, taken away due to alcohol, domestic violence.” Participant T stated “Six or seven start seeing violence and my dad used drugs since I was really young, witnessed violence and drugs.”

In his study, Waldram (1997) described that of the 249 Aboriginal offenders interviewed, 80 percent of them noted that at least one of their parents had an alcohol or

drug problem. Also, Johnston (1997) interviewed a 10 percent sample of federal Aboriginal offenders about their childhood background. This study revealed that the prevalence of early alcohol (58 percent) and drug abuse (60 percent) were commonplace among these Aboriginal offenders.

Offender Substance Abuse

Four out of the six participants admitted substance abuse is a problem for them of the other two of the six participants, one chose not to answer, while the other was referred to an Aboriginal offender substance abuse program because this was deemed an issue related to his criminal history. Here are a few of the participants' responses about how their own substance abuse affected their lives. Participant A "Forgets who he is, does what he wants, commits a crime, drinking to cover up his past, Involved in a lot of alcohol, drugs and crime." Participant C "When I got kick out of school when I was 18 and became an Iron Worker, I started to use drugs." Participant I "Tasted alcohol when I was 12. All my convictions are related to alcohol that got me to jail."

Trevethan, Moore, and Rastin (2002) have indicated that 92 percent of the Aboriginal offenders have a high need to address substance abuse problems. It is important to recognize the 'secondary disabilities' identified as part of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) in the context of those social characteristics that are the result of colonialism and related policies of discrimination, attempts at forced assimilation and economic marginalization experienced by Aboriginal people (Tait, 2003).

The result of colonialism has impacted the over-representation of incarcerated Aboriginal people as well as the common stereotypes of the "drunken Indian" may direct

others to assume that FASD is a contributing factor to Aboriginal peoples' involvement with the criminal justice system.

Although it was not possible to find out if the offenders that were interviewed had some degree of FASD, it could be hypothesized on the basis of the rate of occurrence of FASD in offenders and their discussion of alcoholism in their families, it is likely some of them were affected by FASD.

If FASD has been identified as a contributing factor on why offenders are involved with the criminal justice system, and Aboriginal people are over-represented in this system, can we not suggest that FASD is connected to Aboriginal people incarcerated?

Violence and Abuse

Paletta (2008) clearly establishes a link between abusive behaviour and the abuser's experiences as a victim of violence in the past. Five of the six participants stated that they witnessed or were exposed to some form of violence and abuse as children. Often, individuals who are exposed to or witness violence as a child become a perpetrator of violence when they become adults. The majority of the participants in this study either witnessed violence or were abused as children and became a perpetrator of violence as adults. Below is one participant's comment that supports this point. Participant A "Whipped for nothing, whipped for not cleaning floors properly, damage stays with you (referring to the four to five years he spent at the Residential School)."

Many Aboriginal children, like participant A, witnessed and suffered abuse at the Residential Schools. Participant Q describes how this intergenerational trauma of family violence has impacted him by stating "Two or three years old, taken away, alcohol abuse,

domestic violence.” These Residential Schools were not places that provided a family environment and many of the children were subjected to physical and/or sexual abuse. This has contributed to the intergenerational transmission of violence.

A study undertaken on child abuse and neglect identifies exposure to family violence as the second most prevalent factor for taking Aboriginal children into child welfare custody (Paletta, 2008, para 3, p.3). This exposure as a child to family violence may contribute to why so many Aboriginal offenders commit violence toward others. Participant T describes his childhood by stating “Six or seven years old, start seeing violence and my dad used drugs since I was really young, witnessed violence and drug abuse.” Participant I “probably not so scared for me but probably would have been scary for you. My Dad drank a lot, eh. Yeah, lot’s of violence, just normal, eh.”

Children who are exposed to family violence may:

have poor academic achievement, inhibiting their ability to improve their life (and health) circumstances in the future, experience psychological problems, hopelessness, depression and low self worth, become aggressive themselves, thus perpetuating the cycle of violent and abusive behaviour, and experience emotional problems including anxiety, depression, dissociation and psychosis (Bowlus, McKenna, Day, & Wright, 2003).

The majority of participants in this study experienced many of the phenomena indicated above. As well, it must be noted that studies have provided evidence that the Residential School System has caused similar negative circumstances for many survivors of these schools (Chrisjohn, Young, & Maraun, 2006; Milloy, 1999). It is important to realize that this abuse suffered at Residential Schools has been generationally passed down, hence, many Aboriginal offenders become involved in the criminal justice system due to the exposure of violence and abuse as a child and then become perpetrators of the same violence as an adult.

Previous Incarceration

The most up-to-date numbers from Statistics Canada show that Aboriginal people constitute 20 percent of the offender population in provincial and federal jails (Rudin, n.d.).

Three of the participants served their first period of incarceration at the age of 14. The other two participants were 16.

This research and many other studies reveal the sad situation of Aboriginal people becoming incarcerated at a young age (CSC, 1999; Laforme, 2005). The three participants incarcerated have similar experiences to the findings in the study by Vanderburg, Weekes & Millson (1994), which state that, “on average, Native offenders were just slightly older than 15 at the time of their first conviction.” The majority of Aboriginal offenders in this study have been previously incarcerated in a group home or a young offender’s facility.

Statements similar to those reported by York in the Literature Review were provided by Participant A, “Forgets who he is, does what he wants (meaning he does not care about consequences), commits crime” and participant B, “Not many people look out for me, they look out for themselves.” How many other Aboriginal people involved in the justice system are thinking and feeling this way? Previous studies suggest the answer to this question is that there are many Aboriginals thinking and behaving this way so the next question would be how do we as Canadians prevent this, or assist them to think differently? (Braun, 1998; Milloy, 1999; Rudin, n.d.). Below are some more comments related to the participants’ previous incarceration experiences. Participant A “at age of 14 years old, he was not going to school. Age 17 served three months for fraud of welfare,

70 or 80 dollars.” Participant B “I was always in jail, ages 14 to 18 years old, I was in Jail, didn’t have a life.” Participant C “Incarcerated at age 16, I broke into a school, received a day or two sentence.” Participant Q “14 years old.” Participant T “I was in detention center at age 16.”

Participant A has served three other periods of incarceration, his current incarceration is a 28-year federal sentence, which commenced at age 21. Participants C and Participant I indicated they were incarcerated five times. Two other participants stated they were incarcerated over 20 times. Participant A “Been in prisons across Canada.” Participant C “My rat sheet’s ain’t that big, a handful.” Participant T “More than 20 times...The more I think about it, that’s quite a bit.” Participant I “Five or six times. Three or four provincial and two federal.”

Aboriginal youth are over-represented among criminal young people. Research shows Aboriginal youth are incarcerated at earlier ages and for longer periods of time than non-Aboriginal young people. The Participants in this study reported similar patterns of involvement within the Criminal Justice System, thus supporting the literature.

In 2000, 41.3 percent of all federally incarcerated Aboriginal offenders were 25 years of age or younger (CSC, 2008). First Nations youth are the fastest growing demographic group in Canada and it is expected this will have a significant impact on the Criminal Justice System (CSC, 2008). Statistics Canada population projections to 2017 suggest that the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal peoples among newly sentenced offenders will continue to grow in federal and provincial correctional systems, particularly in the West and in the North (Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Corrections, 2006-2011). If the current trend continues unchecked, the Aboriginal population in

Canada's correctional institutions could reach the 25 percent mark in less than 10 years. As a result, it is important to have more and better alternatives to put in place other than incarceration for Aboriginal people. It is important to have better programs and rehabilitation methods inside the prisons. Also there needs to be better alternatives for Aboriginal people involved in the criminal justice system than just sending them to jails.

Overall, the findings in this study suggest why Aboriginal offenders have extensive contact with youth detention centers and adult prisons, which has played a significant role in keeping them over-represented and enmeshed within the criminal justice system.

Education

It is noted that Aboriginal youth have a higher chance of being sentenced to prison than they do of obtaining a high school diploma (Laforme, 2005). Poor education or lack of education is a contributing factor to crime, which is prevalent in far too many Aboriginal communities, along with poverty, substance abuse, violence, involvement with the Residential School and child welfare systems, factors which contributed to the over-representation of Aboriginal offenders (CSC, 1999; Johnston, 1997; Laprairie, 1997).

In this study, two participants attained grade eight and one other participant attained grade 10, as described below. Participant A, who attended Residential Schools, didn't state his level of education, neither did Participant B and I. Participant B "Locked up in Prison between ages 14 to 18." Participant C "Kicked out of school when he was 18, went to grade 10." Participant Q "Up to grade eight, good student, then went downhill from there. In grade six, the teachers notice I had ADHD, put me on Ritalin, make me

sick and like a zombie.” Participant T “Went to eight grade, ninth grade did not do nothing.” Participant I “I have low education, going to programs, not know what to do.”

Aboriginal Programs

It is important to gather information about the offenders’ perspectives on their experiences with CSC healing and intervention programs. It is also important to examine some of the factors which the offenders themselves perceived as contributing to their incarceration. This examination may aid Aboriginal offenders in their efforts to take a different path other than one of incarceration. It would also help CSC to design more effective programs and cultural activities to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in the criminal justice system. As well, it would allow professionals and others working with Aboriginal offenders the opportunities to better assist their clients through services, programs and cultural teachings.

Historically, CSC operated within a dominant model, despite efforts to the contrary, and primarily forced Western criminal justice beliefs and practices on all inmates. These practices are unable to effectively accommodate Aboriginal offenders, resulting in the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system (Coates, Gray & Hetherington, 2006). A main goal should be to work with Aboriginal communities to prevent incarceration and to heal those affected by intergenerational trauma and social dysfunction.

In the past, CSC’s programs have been more exclusive than inclusive of Aboriginal offenders (Gay, 2003, cited in Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p.317). CSC has failed to understand the differing culture, languages, values and beliefs, especially of Aboriginal offenders and instead has taken a one size fits all approach.

For many Aboriginal offenders, including the participants in this study, admission into CSC's federal prison system is like an introduction into "two worlds": one requiring Aboriginal offenders to abide by all the non-Aboriginal policies and rules, and the other requiring them to adjust to or integrate into the Aboriginal world introduced to them inside the prison walls.

Many Aboriginal offenders come into contact with their Aboriginal culture for the first time upon incarceration. Some of them are pressured or persuaded to participate in Aboriginal programs, and do so not necessarily because they want to, but because they feel they are required to do so. Through my dealings with other CSC program officers, I have been apprised that some Aboriginal offenders have demanded the right to only take Aboriginal programs, which may have delayed their release back into the community. Many Aboriginal offenders are aware that CSC has a legal obligation to offer Aboriginal specific programs under Section 79 of the Conditional Release Act. Participant A in this study mentioned "how it would be good to have Aboriginal programs offered in Ontario like they do out west, in the Prairie Region." The Prairie Region includes the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The Prairie Region offers more Aboriginal programs because of the higher Aboriginal offender population. Over approximately the last 10 years or so, CSC has developed stronger working relationships with Aboriginal Communities. They have sought out Elders to offer spirituality, cultural healing and curriculum specifically for Aboriginal offenders. Many Aboriginal offenders experiencing traditional teachings indicated that serving federal time is often their introduction to culturally appropriate Aboriginal programming and spirituality.

LaPrairie (1997, p.79) describes the CSC's approach as:

...cultural/spiritual in nature, with an added emphasis on facilitating the release of Aboriginal offenders and connecting them to communities. Underlying the approach is the belief that unique solutions are required to reflect the unique cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal inmates, and that loss of lack of cultural roots and identity are the primary causes of involvement in the criminal justice system.

Studies indicate that Aboriginal offenders often respond positively to Aboriginal specific programs (Bracken, Deane & Morrissette, 2009; CSC, 2008;). It is apparent that the participants in this study wanted to participate in Aboriginal specific programs because it met their cultural and spiritual needs. These programs become a valuable asset in reducing the risk of reoffending and assist in the reintegration of Aboriginal offenders into their communities.

All of the participants in this study strongly suggested the importance of having Aboriginal programs. This finding addresses one of the main research questions concerning gathering the perspectives of the Aboriginal offenders on their experiences with the CSC's healing and intervention programs. Participant A stated "In Search of your warrior, Aboriginal programs are to help me change my way of life. It is the way of my lifestyle, my past and family circle. Easy for me to relate to Aboriginal programs." Participant B noted "Should have more Aboriginal Programs." Participant Q asserted "The traditional ones, not the stop light ones (referring to a non-Aboriginal program). Access to Aboriginal programs, yes, it takes a long time to get into them, not as many as there should be. In Search of your warrior, talking about your past, see why made choices you made...." Participant C "When they come to prison, they want to learn their heritage, some people know nothing about their heritage, nothing about their culture, people actually learn. Different people do different things. An Aboriginal Indian doing white person's program, if he comes from a reserve, there is nothing to benefit from that."

Non-Aboriginal programming may not be as beneficial to some Aboriginal offenders returning back to their communities upon their release. CSC programs are internationally recognized and much research and dedication has gone into ensuring that the programs being offered to offenders adequately address the risk of reoffending and provide assistance with reintegration efforts. A number of Aboriginal offenders are coming from and returning to urban centers as opposed to Aboriginal communities. Therefore, it could be argued that taking non Aboriginal programs can be beneficial, as programs in general can help offenders address risk to reoffend.

In the late 1990s, CSC (Ontario Region) established the Aboriginal Initiatives Department. The department was intended to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the offender population. This meant delivering Aboriginal programs that would address and manage the risk areas of the Aboriginal offenders

Participant Q and C asserted “that the more relevant and culturally sensitive the program is, the more relevant and helpful it will be in addressing the Aboriginal offender’s personal issues.”

Participant I stated:

An Inuk guy teaching, learn from his mistakes. Down south teaching, smart guys got paper on the wall, in his home town, smart person their papers in the heart, they seen it they know it, long time ago, had to do everything. Family Violence, ASAP, Cognitive Skills, in a way it was helpful, didn’t really understand it.

Historically, Inuit taught their children through modeling and by interacting with their children. The children learned indirectly through watching and listening. These learning methods are supported by what the Inuk (Participant I) stated in the above paragraph.

Today's non-Aboriginal education system is highly structured and teaches through formal and direct educational methods – a much different approach from the way Inuit teach their youth. (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2004). This difference in learning models supports the need to have Aboriginal teachings and traditional methods integrated into programming. Non-Aboriginal people attend educational institutions to seek and find knowledge and wisdom. Many Aboriginal people are taught by Elders through whom wisdom, tradition, and cultural teachings are passed on to future generations.

Participant T suggested having a Native library in the institution. Having Aboriginal literature, books and information about the culture, traditions, history and ceremonies provide learning and understanding for those Aboriginal offenders connecting with their Aboriginal Identity for the first time. This library can also be used by non-Aboriginals to help them become aware of the historical circumstances of Aboriginals. It could possibly help to eliminate negative stereotypes and racist belief surrounding Aboriginal people.

All of the participants were concerned about the limited number of Aboriginal programs available, and the difficulty in accessing these programs. There is a common request for culturally-specific activities and ceremonies and for the translation of existing programs to include Aboriginal language.

Aboriginal Culture

Another theme appearing in the data is the Aboriginal offenders' cultural and spiritual participation. Many of the Aboriginal offenders in this study enjoyed participating in native cultural ceremonies. There was a desire to have more ceremonies available. Many Aboriginal offenders participate in native ceremonies for the first time

while in prison because many of these ceremonies are limited or absent in their communities. In addition, many times the Aboriginal offender was not following his culture and teachings and was not on the right path of healthy living. The enjoyment of and desire for more cultural and spiritual ceremonies is what makes them become more connected with their Aboriginal identity.

The Aboriginal offenders in this study appear to be reconnecting with their spirituality and participating in spiritual ceremonies inside the prison. Aboriginal culture is focused on family, community, and harmony. It teaches that everything in the world is interconnected. Interconnectedness can be viewed as the individual's connection to the world outside the self (Waldram, 2007). This means to be reconnected to friends, family, culture, spirituality and community. In this study, many of the participants are trying to reconnect with their families and communities. This interconnectedness is well described by Ross (1992) when he stated:

We are not alone, nor can we go it alone. We are here not to assert our dominion or to rise above the rest, but to make a contribution to the rest. The successful man is the one who understands his role as the conduit of sustenance for all components of creation and who dedicates his efforts towards maintaining harmony and balance within all creation. (p. 182 as cited in McCormick and Wong, 2005).

Aboriginal ceremonies, sweat lodges and smudging, reinforce and support cultural values/traditions, helping to remind Aboriginal people that keeping connected to family and community is important. Five of the six participants mentioned and acknowledged the importance of Aboriginal culture. As one participant stated "Grew up with traditional language, longhouse, and traditional ways to this day I still dance with a group." Another participant stated "Grandmother, very traditional, grow up traditional way, the longhouse, strictly traditionalist, we followed Grandma's way." Participant C described his own

opinion on how he sees other Aboriginal offenders get reconnected with their culture.

Participant C stated “When they come to prison, they want to learn their heritage. Some people know nothing about their heritage, nothing about their culture and people actually learn.”

A good illustration of this disconnection and then reconnection to one’s culture or heritage is described by Participant I when he said “I didn’t even know I was Inuk that is why I always say my first language is English...maybe that’s why I can’t eat fish”.

In his interview, Participant I talked on how he learned about and became reconnected with his culture through his relationships with Elders and by being introduced to food such as caribou meat. Through this reconnection and relationship with the Elders, it reminded him of the importance of carving as he recalls watching his father, brothers and sisters perform this cultural activity.

Bracken, Deane and Morrisette (2009) indicate personal healing through the reacquisition of cultural traditions is one way to overcome structural constraints of prison while at the same time supporting an individual decision to cease from crime. Many CSC documents (1999, 2008) note that Aboriginal offenders reconnecting with their culture and tradition tend to be less involved in criminal activities within the prison, which helps them heal and move forward with their reintegration back into the community.

It is important to have Aboriginal programs, Elders and Aboriginal Liaison officers to ensure that Aboriginal ceremonies and traditional cultural teachings are properly offered within the prison system. The Elders and Native Liaison officers are valuable staff members of CSC, as they work solely with the Aboriginal population and play an integral

part in addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal people among those who are incarcerated.

Beliefs About Prevention

Community involvement and change of attitude help to provide answers to the research question surrounding what could have prevented the Aboriginal offender from becoming incarcerated. The following factors: a change in attitude, better choices, and support from community members, programs and cultural teachings have helped to prevent Aboriginal offenders from re-offending. Aboriginal programming and cultural teachings provide lessons that can assist Aboriginal people from becoming incarcerated as well as those who are in prison.

My hope is this research will be read by other professionals, educators, and community members who work with Aboriginals involved in the criminal justice system so that they can understand and address the over-representation of these offenders. Hopefully, the personal experiences and voices of the Aboriginal offenders in this study will be shared with younger Aboriginal people to prevent them from becoming incarcerated. The goal is that Aboriginal youth will learn from the choices made by these Aboriginal offenders and make better choices.

Community Involvement

Four out of the six participants mentioned that having Aboriginal community members' involved in the correctional system is important. It has been my experience that many of the Aboriginal offenders have trust issues, especially when it comes to dealing with Institutional staff, whether they are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal.

Aboriginal community involvement in the prison enables the development of trust, hope,

and learning and offers resources for the future reintegration of the offender. Several of the participants provided comments about the importance of having community members' involvement. Participant A stated "Could involve themselves, talk to offenders about their way of life. It is not that they don't care, they don't know." Participant B noted "Have more culture, teachings from community members." Participant Q pointed out "It is important Aboriginal community members come see me and us." Participant T stated "It would nice to have people coming in, guest speaker."

Change of attitude

Five out of the six participants reported various positive changes in their attitude towards themselves and others. Participant A "In search of your warrior, Aboriginal programs, to help me change my way of life." In search of your warrior program is a violence prevention program targeted for Aboriginal offenders with a violent offending history. Participant B "Learn from my mistakes, and hopefully be a good person some day." Participant C "I finally see it, open my eyes, I want to be with my kids." Participant T "It makes me think. I can do better. I want to do better." Participant "I get out and don't want to come back."

The last research question is "what had led the Aboriginal offender to incarceration?" The majority of the participants have experienced substance abuse, poverty, lack of education and violence. They have also experienced previous terms of incarceration, involvement with the child welfare system, Residential School, and the effects of intergenerational trauma. These factors and their own previous experiences increase the likelihood of an Aboriginal person becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

Four out of the six participants identified substance abuse as a factor leading to their incarceration. Participant A emphasized and said “That the abuse he experienced at Residential School for four to five years led him towards incarceration.” As he stated “So that led to a lot of alcohol, a lot drugs, and a lot of crime.” Participant B attributed his involvement with incarceration to making bad choices (drug and alcohol abuse and committing crimes) and he stated “I was an A..hole and here I am.” Participant C mentioned “doing drugs, hanging out with the wrong people. Living the fast and easy life, you know what I mean, money and stuff like that.” Participant Q stated “Abuse and neglect,” which he suffered at the foster homes resulting in him being violent and abusing substances. Participant T was very specific when asked this question about what had led him to incarceration; he stated “The big thing was my grandfather passed away. I just lost touch with everything, right.” Participant I attributed his incarceration to alcohol and supported this by stating “All my convictions are related to alcohol, I mean all the convictions that brought me to jail.”

There is no doubt that these particular negative factors: previous terms of incarceration, involvement with the child welfare system, the effects of Residential School, the effects of intergenerational trauma, substance abuse, poverty associated to the Aboriginal person contributed to the over-representation in the criminal justice system (La Prairie, 1996; Milloy, 2001; Trevethan, 1991).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

There were four main research questions: how do Aboriginal offenders describe their experiences at the Residential School and child welfare systems; 2) what led to their incarceration; 3) how their incarceration could have been prevented; 4) and what their experiences relating to CSC's healing/intervention programs were of benefit to them. This research study examined Aboriginal offenders' personal experiences related to the four questions described above.

The personal stories and voices of the Aboriginal offenders reveal their perceptions, feelings, attitudes, beliefs and the meaning they derived from their own experiences with Residential School, the child welfare system, what led them to and what could have prevented their incarceration, and their experience with CSC's healing and intervention programs. The majority of the participants in the study appear to be open and transparent with their answers to the research questions. It was their openness and transparency about their private thoughts and feelings that will allow readers of this research paper more intimate insights into their experiences.

Residential School and child welfare system

There appears to be a connection between the Aboriginal offenders' previous experiences with Residential School and the child welfare systems and their incarceration. As a result of their experiences with Residential Schools and the child welfare system, participants reported feelings such as hidden madness, shyness, shame, depression, anger, and isolation. Narratives and life experiences shared by these participants suggested Residential Schools have had enduring negative effects on them.

Zellerer (2003) found similar feelings were shared by others, who attended Residential Schools. These feelings have been described as pain, fear, loneliness, guilt, anger, hopelessness, and shame. These feelings have been found to contribute to alcoholism, suicide, violence, and incarceration. Aboriginals are vastly over-represented in federal institutions and continue to suffer the shameful and devastating impact of colonization; from Residential School, to the child welfare system, to young offenders' facilities, and provincial jails.

The majority of the participants in this study had been involved with the child welfare system and had experienced some form of family fragmentation, whether it was family violence or witnessing substance abuse. McMillen and Tucker (1999) found low educational levels, poor job skills, substance abuse and increased risk of psychiatric care to be among the effects of being reared in foster care. In fact, many of the Aboriginal people who are incarcerated come from foster homes. Van der Woerd and Cox (2002) identify other studies that have shown that a lack of family connectedness is associated with delinquency and an unhealthy well being. These individuals felt a sense of displacement, of not feeling welcome back into their home communities and of not really feeling any sense of belonging anywhere, which led to alcohol and drug abuses and going back to what they knew, that is criminal behavior and prison (Saulis, 2001).

Roy, Rutter and Pickles (2000) find that characteristics of children reared in foster and institutional care include behavioural difficulties, lack of social skills, disruptive behaviour, hyperactivity, and emotional disturbance. Previous studies demonstrate how these factors play a direct correlation to incarceration, as well as provide a link between

the socio-economic position of Aboriginal people and their involvement with committing criminal activity (Braun, 1998, Laforme, 2005 & RCAP, 1996).

Poverty

Over half of the Aboriginal participants in this study had been affected by poverty. Poverty is one of the best predictors whether an individual will come into conflict with the law. Aboriginal people are over-represented among the poor and thus, they will also be over-represented among those in jail (Rudin & Roach, 2002, p.25). Aboriginal people who suffer from experiencing negative socio-economic factors and financial hardship are more conducive to exposure of criminality. When all of these negative historical, social and economic factors are considered together, and the criminogenic nature of poverty, it is quite easy to see how the possibility of these factors have contributed to over-representation of Aboriginals become evident.

Substance Abuse

Almost three quarters of the Aboriginal participants in this study stated that they had a substance abuse problem. These and other Aboriginals have suffered tragic circumstances in their lives and were substance abusers and were abusing some kind of substance during the commission of their crimes. The over-representation of Aboriginal people is inseparable from their struggles with substance abuse (Havemann, Couse, Foster & Matonvich, 1985). Aboriginal offenders show high levels of substance abuse compared to non-Aboriginals, which suggests the population may be disproportionately impacted by the effects of substance abuse.

Violence and Abuse

An overwhelming five out of the six participants in this study noted they had witnessed or directly experienced violence as a child. It is important to recognize that violence affects an individual in different ways and can have devastating consequences on the individual and his or her family. The marginalization of Aboriginal people has made them vulnerable to higher rates of violence and abuse. It also contributes to the social issues discussed in this study such as poverty, substance abuse, low levels of education and acceptance that violence is common (Laforme, 2005).

Three of the six participants reported being perpetrators of violence. There is a strong possibility that the other three participants were also perpetrators of violence, particularly because these participants have also experienced physical abuse, had negative experiences with peers or at school, and have substance abuse issues. Health Canada (2000) reported that violent behaviours have been increasing among Aboriginals (cited in Bracken, Deane & Morrissette, 2009). Furthermore previous violence, substance abuse, and mental health issues have been linked to increased involvement with violent behaviour, which then leads to incarceration for most Aboriginal people.

Education

Over half of the participants have grade 11 or lower, none had attained a high school equivalent. Laprairie (1997) noted that lack of education is one of the factors related to Aboriginals becoming incarcerated. Van der Woerd and Cox (2002) said that Aboriginal youth who share a high feeling that they do not belong at school, have a higher drop-out rate than non-Aboriginal students, and are more likely to abuse drugs, become involved with committing crimes and other risky behaviours than those who stay

in school and graduate. There are several studies (Johnston, 1997; Laprairie, 1997; Solicitor General, 1988) that revealed the low level of education attained by Aboriginal offenders.

Poverty, substance abuse, violence and lack of education are all factors that have been discussed in response to the research question about what led the participants in this study to incarceration and as such contributed to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people within the prison system. For example, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) has identified a link between adverse socio-economic conditions and rates of incarceration. Other studies also suggest the reason that crime is so problematic in Aboriginal communities is because of the lack of employment, educational and other opportunities (Maaka & Andersen, 2006; Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996). Along with living in poverty, the prevalence of violence and substance among Aboriginal people, results in involvement with the Criminal Justice System (Menzie, 2006). According to Menzie (2006) Aboriginal people are also over-represented among the homeless in urban centers in Canada.

My research study suggested that poverty, substance abuse, violence, and education factors influence the extent to which the participants, and by extension other Aboriginal peoples are involved in the Criminal Justice System. In addition, Hunter and Borland (1999 as cited in Maaka & Andersen, 2006) found that the high rates of arrest of Aboriginal people for non-violent offences are related to low rates of education and employment.

Previous Incarceration

All participants in this study had experienced previous incarceration, either as young offenders or due to prior provincial and federal sentences, or in both of these ways. The following circumstances or factors are possible reasons as to why there are so many Aboriginal people experiencing several previous terms of incarceration:

- Aboriginal people who are accused of criminal behaviour are more likely to be denied bail;
- Aboriginal people spend more time in pre-trial detention;
- Aboriginal people accused are more likely to be charged with multiple offences, and often for crimes against the criminal justice system;
- Aboriginal people are more likely not to have legal representation at court proceedings;
- Aboriginal clients, especially those living in northern communities, spend less time with their lawyers because the court party flies (their own lawyer) in the day of the hearing and then out the same day.
- A court schedule in remote areas tends to be poorly planned, judges may have limited time to spend in the community;
- Aboriginal offenders are more than twice as likely to be incarcerated than non-Aboriginal offenders;
- Aboriginal Elders who are also spiritual leaders, are not given the same status as prison chaplains, in every institutions, and
- Aboriginal people often plead guilty because they are intimidated by the court and simply want the proceedings to be over (Rudin, n.d.)

In addition to the above factors, there are definite issues in regards to sentencing Aboriginal people in the court system. Quigley (1994 as cited in Braun, 1998) stated:

Socioeconomic factors such as employment status, level of education, family situation, etc., appear on the surface as neutral criteria. They are considered as such by the legal system. Yet they can conceal an extremely strong bias in the sentencing process. Convicted persons with steady employment and stability in their lives, or at least prospects of the same, are much less likely to be sent to jail for offences that are borderline imprisonment offences. The unemployed, transients, the poorly educated are all better candidates for imprisonment. When the social, political and economic aspects of our society place Aboriginal people disproportionately within the ranks of the latter, our society literally sentences more of them to jail. This is systemic discrimination.

Lapraire (1996) noted that Aboriginal offenders experience higher rates of substance abuse and served a previous federal jail term. They are also disproportionately convicted of violent offences (Laprairie, 1996).

Negative socio-economic factors, as well as previous incarceration provides a better understanding of what caused the Aboriginal participants in this study to become incarcerated. The research question that needs further examination is “What happened in your past that has led to you being in prison?”

All participants agreed that substance abuse was a contributing factor in them committing crimes, which resulted in contact with the criminal justice system leading to eventual incarceration. The majority of the participants mentioned that they suffered abuse as children and that this is internalized and sometimes expressed through negative behaviour when they were teenagers or young adults. A few participants mentioned that they got involved with the wrong crowd and made bad choices.

Aboriginal Culture and Programs

All the participants in this study talked about the need for more Aboriginal programs and spiritual and cultural activities such as sweat lodge ceremonies. Aboriginal

spirituality and cultural activities are major factors in successful reintegration into the community (Heckbert and Turkington, 2001).

The majority of the participants recommended that the programs mentioned above be designed and delivered by Aboriginal facilitators. They also recommended inviting the wisdom and guidance of Aboriginal Elders. Programs based on the culture and tradition of Aboriginal people that involve healing and ceremonies have a greater chance of success than programs developed and delivered by non-Aboriginal people. Johnston (1997) found that Aboriginal offenders say they are more trusting and comfortable with Aboriginal facilitators, especially spiritual advisors and Elders.

CSC has started to implement more Aboriginal specific programs, and spiritual and cultural services in the Ontario region which will hopefully assist Aboriginal offenders with their reintegration efforts. Aboriginal staff, Native brotherhood is now referred to as Aboriginal wellness group and other Aboriginal projects have also been created within the prison system (Commissioner's Directive, 1995, cited Martel & Brassard, 2008). The Aboriginal Wellness Group is comprised of Aboriginal inmates or Non-Aboriginal inmates who meet to participate in social, recreational and spiritual meetings, with or without an Elder. The Aboriginal offenders often work with the Aboriginal Liaison officer to bring in external resource people.

The majority of Aboriginal participants in this study were being introduced to their culture, tradition and spiritual ceremonies for the very first time. Interestingly, many Aboriginal offenders are reconnected with their Aboriginal culture upon incarceration. This reconnection with their culture is an Aboriginal reclamation of belief systems, practices, languages, and traditions in order to overcome negative personal experiences

and problems. The Aboriginal programs and healing interventions develop personal and group empowerment of will and of spirit, caring and respect, spirituality, honour, and cultural pride through the promotion of cultural identity and traditional values (LaFramboise, Trimble, and Mohatt, 1990).

There should be little doubt that these particular factors, previous terms of incarceration, involvement with the child welfare system, the effects of Residential School, the intergenerational trauma, substance abuse, and poverty of these Aboriginal participants involved with the justice system that point towards their involvement in both crime and incarceration as offenders.

Limitations

The small number of Aboriginal participants prevents generalizing from this study to the entire population of incarcerated Aboriginal people. Therefore, the results of this study must be treated as suggestions only for this particular group.

The Aboriginal offenders' could have provided answers to the ARA that they thought would assist with their release into the community. Their answers may not necessarily be applicable to their own circumstances, which could have an effect on the findings of this study. CSC's institutional environment can sometimes have a negative influence on the participants' involvement with studies, such as this one, which could have affected their answers. As well, the participants in this study may not provide accurate responses as a result of their own personal distrust of authority figures. They may have viewed the Aboriginal Research Assistant as such which may have affected their answers.

Choosing one federal institution and working within a correctional environment could pose a number of problems. One problem may have been the comprehension level of the Aboriginal offenders because English may be their second language. A second problem is that there were a limited number of participants interested in participating in this study, which made it difficult to have enough data to form themes.

Recommendations

A future research study could involve Aboriginal youth, when they first come into contact with the criminal justice system to capture their voices and personal experiences and discuss with them how they could take a path other than future incarceration. As professionals working in the criminal justice system have often remarked young offenders often graduate to the provincial and federal institutions. Hopefully, we can change this saying to young offenders are going onto graduate from high school, universities and colleges.

Provide current incarcerated Aboriginals an opportunity to inform and share their path towards incarceration with Aboriginal students and those youth who are going down similar path. It is a hope that by sharing these stories, these younger Aboriginal people will see the light, learn from the incarcerated Aboriginals' previous mistakes and their negative experiences and not choose this similar corridor towards involvement with the justice system.

As stated by the Aboriginal offenders in this study, we must have more Aboriginal community members involved in the lives of Aboriginal youths to help them avoid getting into trouble, and find positive outlets such as participating in sports, arts and crafts, pow wows and other cultural events. We need to instil hope and inspiration in

youth so that they have something to look forward to in their lives. This is currently happening in all of our Aboriginal communities; however, we need to keep working towards this goal. CSC should allocate more resources and financial assistance to Aboriginal communities who are dealing with their members involved in the prison system.

There should be recognition that within the traditional Aboriginal culture, community support is critical for the development of healthy individuals and families. Holistic healing is achieved with a balance of a healthy mind, spirit and body and the guidance of a healthy community (Menzies, 2006).

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

This study provided an opportunity for Aboriginal offenders to share their experiences and perspectives on what led them to incarceration. It also created inspiration and pride among participants who felt important to be part of a research study, which gave them a voice. Participant C stated “Hope things go well doing the research. Help anyone of my people to help them get ahead in life, help him get his degree.” Also, participant T stated “Love to see where the research is going, if it is possible, especially part of it. I had something to do with it, gives me a high, instead of sitting in here, taking up space.”

This study provided the personal perspective of offenders on how Residential School, the child welfare system and intergenerational trauma have affected their lives and perhaps offers some insight into the over-representation of Aboriginal offenders among those who are incarcerated. This study also demonstrated how the socio-economic situation of Aboriginal offenders, that is, experience with poverty, substance abuse, poor education, violence and previous incarceration, played a role in their path towards prison. It is important to capture the voices of the Aboriginal offenders and hear how they became incarcerated. Also, we can learn from them in terms of ways in which to help other Aboriginal people from becoming incarcerated.

As Delgado (1989) stated:

[S]tories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset (2413)... Oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation (2436) (Delgado, 1989, as cited in Maurutto and Hannah-Moffat, 2010, p.26).

A major concern of both the Aboriginal offenders in this study and CSC is to offer more Aboriginal-specific programming, as well as to have more Aboriginal culture, tradition and community involvement within the prisons, which will contribute to addressing over-representation of Aboriginal people in prison. This study doesn't address how CSC can get more Aboriginal community involvement and increase traditional cultural activities within their system. There is currently legislation and policies that include having Aboriginal programs and inviting the involvement of the Aboriginal community within the prisons; however, as the participants in this study have noted, there must be more action and increased resources on the part of the CSC and Aboriginal communities in this regard.

Continued effort on addressing Aboriginal over-representation in prisons by focusing on reducing crime in Aboriginal communities, assisting people with substance abuse issues, working with families to keep their children in school and helping to create more job opportunities is a must. Being removed from family is one of the main factors that differentiate Aboriginal people who have been arrested from those who have not. Much of what has been said in terms of continued effort to reduce the Aboriginal over-representation in prison was discussed by all of the participants. Recently, the CSC has begun involving Aboriginal communities and other Justice departments to try to generate better ways of addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in prison. The general public tend to read literature related to the over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in prison without consulting the very people who are the key to understanding how best to resolve this situation of over-representation.

Society at large has moved away from confining Aboriginal children in Residential Schools to confining them as adults in the prison system. The following questions remain: are we merely changing the face of Aboriginal assimilation in Canada? Will the prison system be the last site of forced assimilation while many Canadians work towards the decolonizing of Aboriginal people and the re-negotiation of the social contract between non Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples? It is the hope that this paper provides some further insight from Aboriginal offenders about the immense impact that Residential School, and the child welfare system have had upon their incarceration. Thousands of other Aboriginal offenders have experienced very similar histories, which have led towards their incarceration.

Waldram highlights some common themes regarding the Aboriginal incarcerated men's childhood experience, which is summarized by the following statement:

Abuse at the hands of the parents, relatives, and those invariably experienced the grief of many deaths, including those of parents and siblings. They witnessed violence on many occasions. The basic necessities of life, such as food, and shelter, were often denied them. They were introduced to alcohol and substance abuse at a young age, through which they sought escape (1997, p.68).

This study by Waldram (1997) and my research study revealed and described the negative experiences and consequences leading many Aboriginal offenders to incarceration. My research study created an opportunity for us, the Canadian Public, to gain a better appreciation and understanding of how and why so many Aboriginal people are incarcerated, as well as the opportunity to listen directly to the Aboriginal offenders-themselves. The narratives of the Aboriginal offenders provided these individuals, who are traditionally silenced, an opportunity to participate in something that may help others in ways that can be liberating. Narratives are mechanisms that can be used to “overcome

otherness,” and bring to light “subjugated knowledge” by examining how history continues into the present, implicating individuals today (Hill Collins, 2000, as cited in Maurutto and Hannah-Moffat, 2010, p.26).

George Erasmus, Elder said that many Aboriginal people feel they have not had the definitive opportunity to tell the story of their history from their perspective and that the Canadian public remains largely unaware of the state-imposed violence and genocide towards Aboriginal people. It is important the Canadian public becomes aware of this past violence and genocide towards Aboriginal people so as to educate and provide understanding to why Aboriginal people are over-represented in the prison system.

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