

## CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of children engaging in problem sexual behaviour is an issue that has received very little attention in any sphere, but it is not an issue that has gone completely undocumented. Although data are scarce for both the wider Australian and Indigenous populations, the demand experienced by the very limited number of programs on offer to children with problem sexual behaviour indicates that this behaviour occurs across the country, not only in Indigenous communities. Of the programs that offer counselling for young people who sexually abuse, all report an inability to respond to the ever-increasing demand. Auspiced by the The Children's Protection Society, the Sexual Abuse Counselling Prevention Program (SACPP) has been operational in Victoria since 1993 but the high demand on this program has meant that eligibility for children with problem sexual behaviours is now restricted to young people who reside in the northern suburbs of metropolitan Melbourne (CPS, 2003). The NSW NGO, New Street, caters to children with problem sexual behaviours who are resident of metropolitan Sydney, yet NSW Health estimate that New Street can cater for only 25 per cent of received referrals (NSW Task Force, 2006). The increasing demand on these services points to both the seriousness of this issue, and the urgent need for programs in both prevention and response. In addition to the chronic shortage of broad clinical programs such as these<sup>51</sup> there is also evidence of the urgent need for culturally appropriate programs for Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children. Western Australia Department of Justice reported to the Gordon inquiry that 32 per cent of the convicted juvenile sex offenders in that state are Aboriginal, yet there is not Indigenous specific rehabilitation program for young offenders (2002, p. 243).<sup>52</sup> The urgency in redressing this service provision gap is underscored by the fact that scholars and clinicians agree that the "earliest possible intervention" leads to the best rehabilitative outcomes for the children involved (Flanagan, 2003, p. 147).

Recent media attention has highlighted the adverse conditions in which some Indigenous children live. For this to constitute more than public scrutiny it is crucial that engagement with Indigenous peoples takes place to ensure that this national attention parlays into tangible, practical, culturally appropriate and desired response/s.

<sup>51</sup> The chronic shortage of programs for children with problem sexual behaviour is compounded by a series of complex eligibility requirements that are likely to exclude a great number of children in need of these rehabilitative services. Most of the (already over-subscribed) programs in Australia are open to court mandated clients only. This points to a need for community based programs for children who have not had contact with the criminal justice system. Further, the complex dynamic of sentencing and rehabilitation necessitates urgent review. As identified by the Collaborative Research Unit of the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice: "In the NSW jurisdiction, offenders are not sentenced according to their treatment needs but in accordance with a criminal justice system. . . . Currently, juvenile sex offenders are under-serviced and may be at risk for recidivism." (Kenny et al., (1999a, p. 12)

<sup>52</sup> This review has maintained that there are a host of factors that need to be considered in the design of culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal children. In addition to those considerations already outlined it is important to note recent research that suggests that programs based cognitive-behavioural-therapy appear to have differential outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. "In many Aboriginal communities learning and healing occurs in the presence and at the interest of the group or the community, rather than of the individual (Young 2007; Yavu-Kama-Harathunian 2002). This element of Indigenous culture is unlikely to be compatible with contemporary Western methods of treatment." (McGregor, 2008, p. 6)

The familial breakdown, poverty, educational difficulties, violence, prior victimisation, homelessness, isolation and child sexual abuse suffered by some Indigenous children describes, in complete terms, the risk scenarios and pathways to both child sexual exploitation, and problem sexual behaviour in childhood. The fact that these precursors and correlatives are both disproportionately evident *and* often normalised in Indigenous communities significantly increases the risk that Indigenous children will become involved in childhood problem sexual behaviour and/or sexual exploitation. Scholars cite crucial knowledge gaps in these two areas, and the service provision is clearly lacking. There can be no question that serious attention to these issues, and their devastating effects, is urgently required if the next generation of Indigenous children are to be spared.

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