

# Plight worsens for Australian Aborigines: study

August 25 2011, by Amy Coopes

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The plight of Australia's Aborigines has worsened in the key areas of child abuse, imprisonment and health, a government report found Thursday, warning of "considerable" gaps in their quality of life.

The annual Productivity Commission report card on Aboriginal disadvantage said there had been real progress in just 10 of 45 key indicators, while 17, including prison rates and disease, showed no improvement or had worsened.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard said there were "projects and plans around the nation that are making a real difference" but admitted more needed to be done.

"Every report we get reinforces in me just how hard this is," Gillard said.

"But every report we get too gives me hope for change and I see changes as I move around Australia and talk to people in [indigenous communities](#)."

The report found that Aboriginal children were now more than seven times more likely to be abused or neglected than their non-indigenous counterparts, surging from 15 per 1,000 children in 2000 to 37 per 1,000 last year.

Substantiated abuse and neglect reports increased from four per 1,000 to five per 1,000 for non-indigenous children in the same period, a gap the

report described as "significant".

The prison rate jumped by 59 percent for Aboriginal women in the past decade and by 35 percent for Aboriginal men, with indigenous adults now 14 times more likely to be jailed than the rest of the population, up from 10 times in 2000.

Aboriginal juveniles were 23 times more likely to end up in jail, although the rate has dropped significantly in recent years.

Gaps between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population increased for circulatory diseases, diabetes and [kidney disease](#), with [Aborigines](#) twice as likely to suffer a profoundly debilitating condition than the national average.

Instances of extreme [psychological distress](#) had increased as had hospitalisations for self-harm.

Some 17 percent said they were chronic or high-risk drinkers and 37 percent had been on a drinking binge in the two weeks before they were interviewed, while 27 percent used illicit drugs in the past year.

Among other statistics, Aboriginal teenage birth rates were five times higher than among other Australians, with half of all indigenous mothers smoking during pregnancy -- three times the national average.

Some areas improved, including employment, education and home ownership, but these also advanced among the broader population, "leading to little or no closing of the gaps".

Infant mortality had "improved significantly" in recent decades, but it still remains between 1.6 and three times higher than for non-indigenous people.

"Nine years after this series was commissioned, there is still a considerable way to go if we are to fulfil (the) commitment to close the gap in indigenous disadvantage," the Commission said.

"Wide gaps in average outcomes remain across most indicators."

Australia's original inhabitants, the country's most impoverished minority, are believed to have numbered around one million at the time of white settlement, but are only some 575,600 in a nation of 22 million.

They are a young population with 38 percent aged 14 or less, compared with 19 percent in the broader community.

Male life expectancy was 11.5 years shorter (67 years) for Aborigines and 10 years less for women (73 years).

Just 25 percent now live on their traditional homelands, down from 29 percent in 1994.

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