

In-cell TVs reduce incidents of self-harm and suicide in Aboriginal prisoners

February 24 2014, by Kate Bourne

Access to an in-cell television can significantly improve the psychological wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners, and reduce incidents of self-harm and suicide, according to a University of Adelaide researcher.

Researcher, Dr Elizabeth Grant, has found that in-cell televisions provide other benefits beyond filling in time.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today have a strong relationship with television," says Dr Grant, senior lecturer and researcher at Wirritu Yarlur Aboriginal Education at the University of Adelaide. "It educates and links them to the wider community, particularly those living in remote areas. And Aboriginal programs can help reinforce cultural identity and pride."

Dr Grant surveyed male Aboriginal [prisoners](#) and found 87% said access to an in-cell television was the most important amenity in prison accommodation.

"In-cell televisions help prisoners remain connected to the outside world, reducing feelings of isolation," Dr Grant says.

"Some prisoners even said they chose a physically less 'healthy' custodial environment in order to have access to a personal television."

Dr Grant says Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-

represented in Australian prisons and are more likely than other groups of prisoners to suffer from adverse psychological effects.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise 2.5% of the total Australian population and 26% of the Australian prison community," Dr Grant says.

"Research has found Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners experience increased feelings of despair, hopelessness and isolation."

Dr Grant says there is a community perception that all prisoners should be disadvantaged and not provided with 'luxuries' like televisions.

"The popular view of prisons as 'holiday camps' offering an array of 'luxuries' to an undeserving and dangerous underclass continues to circulate. However, 94% of prisoners will return to live in society, so it's important that the prison system inflicts as little long-term psychological damage as possible," she says.

"Providing prisoners with televisions is a cost-effective way to reduce anxiety and manage mental health issues."

More information: "More than guns or grog: The role of television for the health and wellbeing of Australian Aboriginal prisoners." Grant, Elizabeth Maree, Jewkes, Yvonne. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 2013; 25(2):667-682

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