

# Excluding Indigenous youth from schools may severely increase their risk of incarceration

September 19 2017, by Grace O'brien

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Many Indigenous children, particularly boys aged 10 to 17 years, [are receiving lengthy suspensions](#) from schools throughout Australia. Even

more concerning is the over-representation of young Indigenous males incarcerated in Australia's juvenile detention facilities.

## **Indigenous youth in juvenile correctional facilities**

[Data](#) show Indigenous youth are incarcerated at 25 times the rate of non-Indigenous youth.

Young Indigenous people constitute 8% of Queensland's population aged 10 to 17 years, but make up [53% of those under youth justice supervision](#) on an average day. This is higher than the national level at 45%.

[Research](#) suggests young Indigenous people are more likely to experience incarceration if they have limited educational opportunities, experience socioeconomic hardship or are dealing with an addiction.

## **Educational contexts**

The [International Youth Development Study](#) found young people who were suspended or excluded from education were much more likely to develop anti-social behaviours and engage in criminal activity, which could eventually result in incarceration.

Despite these decisive factors, there is still a gap in the area of research related to the education of Indigenous Australian youth in mainstream schooling and their over-incarceration. This means we lack empirical evidence as to why Indigenous students are being excluded from education.

## **Cultural disconnect**

For many young Indigenous children, schools are Eurocentric establishments offering minimal cultural connections. Many Indigenous students are acutely aware of the cultural disconnect between school and their home lives, which they must deal with every day.

Historically, there have been many political, social and economic decisions that have had a profound impact on the attainment of good educational outcomes for many Indigenous peoples. In the past, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were excluded and segregated from mainstream education. For many, this has resulted in trans-generational disadvantage.

Although there have been numerous policy documents addressing educational disadvantage for Indigenous children, over the past few decades little has changed systemically. For example, the ninth annual [Closing the Gap](#) report released in February this year indicates only one of seven targets is on track.

A lack of cultural knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the educational and juvenile justice sectors hinders practical strategies for change. Many policymakers have little, if any, understanding of the historical disparities faced by Indigenous Australians.

The impact of policies that remove children from their homes and place them in confinement, whether in out-of-home care or incarceration, continues to be a complex issue not duly acknowledged by educators, policymakers or authorities.

## **Indigenous-led strategies need to be heard**

There are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are willing to offer solutions to these complex issues.

However, according to [Amnesty International](#), only two out of the 16 justice programs currently operating in Queensland are Indigenous-led. Community Elders have identified that many children who come into contact with the juvenile justice system should have an opportunity to reaffirm their spiritual and cultural connections to country. Governments need to listen to, work with and support local Indigenous community-led programs at a grassroots level.

One such positive, Indigenous-led strategy in Queensland is the forming of the new [Youth Justice First Nations Action Board](#). It is the first of its kind in Australia. The board's representatives include Indigenous youth [justice](#) workers from throughout Queensland, who continue to work to support young Indigenous people at the local level. We are yet to see what difference this will make, but it is certainly a step in the right direction.

Ultimately, the challenge for policymakers, educators and communities in Australia is to achieve a significant reduction in the numbers of Indigenous students who receive lengthy suspensions or exclusions from school. This could very well have a direct effect on the high numbers of Indigenous [youth](#) incarcerated in juvenile detention centres.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Excluding Indigenous youth from schools may severely increase their risk of incarceration (2017, September 19) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-09-excluding-indigenous-youth-schools-severely.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.