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The Missing Mobile: Impacts from the Incarceration of Indigenous Australians from Remote Communities

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Abstract

In Australia, the numbers and rates of Indigenous incarcerations continue their long-term increase, particularly in the Northern Territory where a third of the population are Indigenous. In this paper, we provide theoretical discourse on incarceration as a form of mobility and demonstrate the demographic scale of impacts for small and remote communities using indirect estimation methods. Results reveal significant proportions, especially those aged 20-39 years, may be missing and mobile through incarceration. Overlaid onto pre-existing high population churn, effects on immobile community members contribute to intergenerational demographic, social and economic dysfunction and point to the need for innovative solutions.

Keywords: Indigenous people, incarceration, mobility, Northern Territory, Indigenous communities, social justice

1. Introduction

In December 2014, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported on the release of the Social Justice and Native Title report by the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda which emphasised the substantial and increasing over-representation of Indigenous Australians in prisons. From 2000-2013, the imprisonment rate for Indigenous adults increased by 57% while the non-Indigenous rate remained fairly stable (Kidd, 2014). Gooda called this development “...one of the most urgent human rights issues facing the nation (Australia) today”, leading to “...knock-on effects in Indigenous communities and having become...an inter-generational problem.” (Kidd, 2014). In addition, Mr. Gooda referred to the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, remarking that “We

have a whole range of targets in the Closing the Gap strategies and the one missing, in my view, is one on justice.” (Kidd, 2014, 1).

The issue of high Indigenous incarceration rates first came to national prominence in political and public arenas during the 1980s when the numbers of deaths in custody increased. In 1987 the Australian Government convened a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody to investigate the circumstances of 99 of such deaths (National Archives of Australia, 2014). The Commission found that, while rates of deaths in prison were similar to non-Indigenous prisoners, high absolute numbers of Indigenous deaths originated from much higher rates of arrests and incarcerations for Indigenous Australians (Ibid.). More recently, the issue of Indigenous incarceration again surfaced after the media aired footage of the mistreatment of Indigenous youths in detention centres in the jurisdiction of the Northern Territory (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2016), where a third of the population are Indigenous in comparison to three percent nationally. This spurred a Royal Commission into the Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (NT) and Queensland, implemented by the Turnbull (Australian) Government in 2016.

Evidence of the detrimental impacts from incarceration on the health, social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous people and their families is ostensive. These are well summarised in a 2009 National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee report on Indigenous incarceration and health:

“Indigenous offenders with an existing substance use, mental health, or physical health problem often have complex needs. Separation from family and culture, together with a previous history of an undiagnosed or untreated health condition, places an Indigenous offender at great risk while in the correctional system. There is the danger of these issues, if left unattended, exacerbating or causing other health problems while an offender is in detention or in prison.” (National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee, 2009, 2)

Meanwhile, Stewart, Henderson and Hobbs (2004) found that Indigenous people are ten times more at risk of death than others once they are released from prison. Main causes for the differences are suicide, drug and alcohol related events, and motor vehicle accidents. A lack of suitable housing is also considered a trigger for post-release trauma and recidivism (Krieg, 2006).

From an academic point of view, there is limited literature on the demographic effects from the incarceration of Indigenous peoples who originate from remote areas specifically. Most Indigenous-specific studies are from the United States of America (USA), focusing on Afro-American and Hispanic communities. These point to social implications from incarceration such like effects of maternal and paternal incarceration on children, as well as financial and economic constraints on families and their communities (for example, Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999; Roberts, 2004; Clear, 2008; Dawson, Jackson and Nyamathi, 2012; Foster and Hagan, 2013). While the US has been labelled the 'world's greatest incarcerator' (Bagaric, 2015, 1), the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia, the focus for this study, has almost double the imprisonment rate for Indigenous residents and the proportion of prisoners who are Indigenous far higher at 86% compared to 49% for non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics (combined) in USA prisons.

Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) were amongst the first to summarise community impacts from high imprisonment rates in the United States, highlighting the depletion of human and social capital for the families and communities 'left behind'. Rose and Clear (1998) established that incarceration alters the socio-economic compositions of neighbourhoods by influencing vital local resources, such as labour markets (also, Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999). Consequently, imprisonment affects numbers of working males and thus incomes for communities and neighbourhoods. They also argued that penal practices are a key factor influencing the mobility of people into and out of a neighbourhood. Both the alteration of socio-economic compositions and increased population turnover rates were seen to diminish social capital and reduce regulatory control.

Furthermore, Lynch and Sabol (2004) found that clusters of incarcerations within social and geographic spaces contribute to a weakening of family formations, labour force attachments and patterns of social interaction amongst residents. In the Australian context, Edney (2002) highlighted the effects of imprisonment, in conjunction with poor outcomes for the numerous other social, economic and health indicators, ensures Indigenous communities are continually fragmented. Fragmentation and the removal of one person for criminal activities may create a vacuum for a new participant to take over the 'role' (Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999) and reduce the pool of mentors for young men (Clear, 2008).

The international literature also points to health impacts from imprisonment. For example, Thomas and Torrone (2006) noted high imprisonment rates were associated with increased rates of sexually transmitted diseases and teenage childbirths. For children 'left behind' Hagan and Dinovitzer found strains on them include socialisation issues (a loss of role models) and stigmatisation (for example, exclusion from social groups), with those transitioning from adolescence to adulthood most affected. Dawson and colleagues (2012) elaborate on child issues pointing to negative behaviours in children including behavioural issues (such as physical aggressiveness), early sexual activity or drug abuse, as well as emotional and financial stress. Hagan & Dinovitzer (1999) also found that parental imprisonment led to depressive symptoms as well as higher alcohol and drug use rates amongst the youth.

A number of studies also suggest that parental incarceration greatly increases the intergenerational transmission of criminality in communities. Murray, Janson and Farrington (2007) found a positive association between the number of parents were incarcerated (before children were aged 19 years) and the number of offenses those offspring were likely to commit during ages 19 to 30 years. For Australia, Cunneen (2001) warned the accumulative effects, particularly from the criminalisation and incarceration of Indigenous people in Australia, have led to the creation of a generation of Indigenous people growing up in a criminal environment.

In remote parts of Australia, large proportions of the population are Indigenous residents who live in small communities. Incarceration in the context of remote Indigenous communities in Australia means that many residents are potentially temporarily absent from their 'home' communities at a point in time. This posits incarceration as a form of mobility and leads us to pose two research questions in relation to this association:

1. What proportions of Indigenous men and women might be 'missing' (away) from remote communities in the NT at any point in time due to incarceration? and
2. What might this mean for the demographic and social fabric of small remote communities in the NT?

Partly because no Australian datasets reliably record a 'home community' or 'pre-prison address' for incarcerated prisoners, there are no existing studies articulating the scale of demographic effects from incarceration for small and remote communities as. As a result, the first research question cannot directly be addressed through modelling of available data. However, an alternative indirect approach is used in this study - a Poisson distribution. This technique is a statistical probability distribution describing the behaviour of simple random events to indicate the range of possible outcomes given the known data. Prior to that exercise, however (in Section 2) we provide important context by profiling, comparing and contrasting incarceration and prisoner data from a range of sources for Indigenous and other prisoners in the Northern Territory and Australia. Subsequently, in Section 3 we discuss some of the theoretical and practical aspects of viewing incarceration as a type of mobility overlaid onto pre-existing mobility patterns in the remote Australian context.

2. Profiling Indigenous people, imprisonment rates and prisoners in the Northern Territory and Australia

The Northern Territory is located in the northern centre of Australia and has just 240,000 residents. A third of these are Indigenous, however, outside of the capital city of Darwin (population 142,000) around half the population are Indigenous with 80% of the 70,000 Indigenous residents there living in small and remote communities (Figure 1). All of these are situated on lands officially defined as 'remote' or 'very remote' according to ABS's land classification system. It is well documented that, overall, residents in remote communities continue to have a very poor socio-economic status (for example, Taylor and Carson, 2009).

Figure 1. Remote Indigenous Communities and Land Ownership in Australia

Source: Altman and Markham, 2014

The primary data sources on imprisonments in Australia are the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Prisons Census, the ABS's Corrective Services Australia publication, the ABS Census of Population and Housing as well as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey. In combination, analysis provides a baseline summary of current and historical rates of Indigenous imprisonment as well as demographic profiling of Indigenous prisoners in Australia (including States and Territories). The ABS defines an adult prisoner as a person aged 18 years and over and has been remanded or sentenced to serve time in an adult custodial corrective agency (ABS, 2014c). It should be noted juvenile Indigenous youth (aged 10-17 years) in Australia are 24 times more likely to be in detention than others are. However, data on youth detention is piecemeal in comparison to that which is available for the adult population (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2015).

Data from the National Prison Census for 2014 show aged standardised imprisonment rates for Indigenous Australians were an order of magnitude higher than for non-Indigenous

people with imprisonment rates highest in Western Australia (WA) (3,013 per 100,000), followed by the Northern Territory (2,390 per 100,000) and South Australia (SA) (2,016 per 100,000) (Author calculations from ABS 2014a.). These are the three states and territories where a relatively high proportion of Indigenous residents live in small and remote communities. Imprisonment rates have continued to grow for Indigenous people in the NT and Australia during the decade to 2014 (Figure 2). For the NT, the rate of increase in incarceration rates is substantially higher, notably after 2010 when the Australian and NT rates began to diverge.

Figure 2. Age standardised Indigenous imprisonment rates per 100,000 adult populations, 2004-2014.

Source: Author calculations from ABS 2014a.

The ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous imprisonment numbers from 2004 to 2014 shows a growing disparity for both Australia and the NT. In 2004, there were 9.5 Indigenous prisoners for every non-Indigenous prisoner in Australia as a whole, climbing to 12.9 by 2014. In the NT, the comparative ratios were 8.3 (2004) and 15.4 (2014). Consequently, within a decade, the over-representation of Indigenous people in prisons increased by a factor of 50% for Australia and by almost 100% for the NT (Author calculations from ABS 2014a). Such increases far exceed rates of population growth.

Profiling prisoners themselves also demarks the growing severity of the situation. In 2014 1,494 inmates (18 years and older) were incarcerated in the NT in 2014, of which 86% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, the highest proportion in the country and far greater than the Indigenous population share of a third (ABS 2014a). Standardising these numbers by age and Indigenous status shows that, although the equivalent of 2.9% of all NT Indigenous residents (aged 18 years and older) were in jail in 2014 (compared to 2.2% nationally), these varied considerably by age and gender. Significantly higher proportions of Indigenous males were in

prison in the NT for every age group and for both sexes compared to the rest of Australia. This was especially high for NT Indigenous males aged 35 to 39 years, at the equivalent of 8.1% of all Indigenous residents in that age group. For the rest of Australia, the highest share of incarcerated Indigenous males was in the 30 to 34 years' age group at 6.5%. Age standardised data show the female prison population in the NT is proportionally older than for the rest of Australia, with more prisoners aged 45 years or more (Author calculations based on ABS 2014a and Northern Territory Department of Treasury and Finance, 2014). The median age for Indigenous male prisoners in the NT in 2014 was 32.5 years and for females 33.2 years. This was much older (39.6 years) for non-Indigenous male prisoners; however, the median age of non-Indigenous female prisoners in the NT was lower at 31.5 years (ABS, 2015a).

It is clear from the data that relatively large numbers of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory are incarcerated at any point in time. Given that 80% of the population of around 75,000 Indigenous residents live in remote settlements, incarceration is clearly a process that is generating mobilities to, from and within remote areas. This type of mobility has many agents and aspects, most obviously the incarcerated, but also, through impacts on the immobile cohort – those people 'left behind' at communities and the collective impacts on communities themselves. We now examine several of the complex and interconnected aspects of incarceration-related mobility for Indigenous residents in the remote Australian context.

3. Indigenous mobility and incarceration

Small and remote communities are spread across sparsely populated landscapes in the northern half of Australia (Taylor, 2011). Residents are known to be highly mobile on a short-term basis, with the literature pointing to complex sets of drivers and factors including cultural activities, visiting families and friends, health treatments and recreation (Zander, Taylor and Carson, 2014). Trips vary greatly in terms of distances, timeframes and travel parties involved. Geographically, they often comprise visits to larger towns or cities to access services or for

recreation, creating circular movements to and from the home community (Taylor, Carson and Carson, 2015). Trips between small communities are also common, with exchanges and flows driven by extended family and kinship networks (Memmott, Long and Thompson, 2005).

Mobility in these contexts has long been negatively associated with individual and community dysfunction for its bearing on education, community stability and economic progress (Taylor and Carson, 2009). Historically, Indigenous mobility has been poorly understood and derided, as the legacy term ‘walkabout’, denoting unplanned and unstructured motivations and mobility facets, suggests (Taylor, 2012). Despite the fact that mobility is usually motivated by similar reasons to non-Indigenous people (for example, visiting friends and relatives, holidays or health treatment) it remains the target for criticism that remote living Indigenous people ‘get up to’ negative anti-social things when they are away from home and ‘in town’ (Lea, 2008; Prout, 2008).

Amongst the many reasons provided in the literature for the high mobility of Indigenous people in remote settings, studies citing incarceration as a factor are meagre with just a handful identifying it as one possible reason for people absences. For example, Memmott, Long and Thomson (2005) studied mobility in and around the remote town of Mount Isa (in the State of Queensland), discussing the distances involved when people are taken away to serve prison sentences and the “Return to Home” scheme in place to assist them with transport back to the home community after the sentence is served. Transportation to and from prison itself has led to a number of deaths, including one case of heatstroke through the neglect of police officers (Creative Spirits, 2016). On a broader scale, Norris and colleagues (2004) identified incarceration as one reason for undercounting of the registered Indian population at discrete communities and for oddities in Census data on Aboriginal migration patterns (for example affecting gender ratios in migration data). The latter alludes to a ‘missing’ cohort and downstream effects on understanding demographic change at community level; itself an important aspect in determining the services and infrastructure provided to individual communities by governments.

For residents of remote Australia (Indigenous or other) going to prison invariably means being transported over great distances, generally hundreds of kilometres. Memmott (2005) reported that 60% of those before the Mount Isa court included people from communities in the NT (a separate jurisdiction whose border is a minimum of 200km from the town and as far as 1,300 km away). Detainees were sent to Townsville prison, a minimum of 1,300 km by road from any Northern Territory community and up to 2,600 km from some. In the context of past colonial Indigenous policies, this form of ‘taking away’ conjures uncomfortable semblances to the forced removal of children from their homelands for the purpose of assimilation during 1910 to the 1970s (SBS, 2015). In similarity, the removal of individuals for incarceration positions them in distant and possibly alien places for extended periods. Large distances and the costs of traversing these may render incarcerated people from remote Australia ‘out of range’ for visits by family and friends.

As the nexus between pre-existing aspects of Indigenous mobility and incarceration as an overlay are not covered in existing literature, we now identify and discuss several theoretical and systemic issues in relation that nexus.

3.1 Key aspects of Indigenous incarceration related mobility

Aside from the aspect of large distances for incarceration-related mobility (and in fact most other mobilities in remote Australia), other dimensions are pertinent when theorising on the nexus between incarceration and mobility in relation to remote living Indigenous people. These include:

- Complex individual behaviours and motivations;
- High churn and return mobility;
- The ‘immobile’ cohort;
- Historical influences; and
- Rites of passage?

3.1.1 Complex individual behaviours and motivations

As for general mobilities, incarceration-related mobility results from specific individual behaviours – notably the act of committing an offence. It might reasonably be argued that in committing an offence the individual should rationally assume the end consequence might be removal from their home and home community to prison. On this basis, and through his or her own actions, the individual is the main agent in incarceration-related mobility. However, while making intuitive sense, this lineal pathway of reasoning predicates many things, not least that the individual in question understands the consequences of their behaviours and how these relate to their pre-existing criminal history, present day legislations and the likely interpretation of these during court proceedings.

While considerations on individual actions and motivations apply to all offenders, there is much literature in the Australian context on the disjuncture between western justice systems and Indigenous systems of punishment and justice (for example, Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, 2010). Despite State and Territory government efforts to specifically account for the difficulties in applying Western models of criminal justice to Indigenous cultural and social contexts (for example, specific courts for Indigenous offenders, non-custodial sentencing options, custodial rehabilitation and therapeutic correction programs and post-release programs), incarceration rates continual to spiral upwards. On that basis, it might be argued that Indigenous people in remote areas remain manifestly dislocated from the knowledge, legal and institutional paradigms of Western justice systems. This may help explain both high rates of offending and recidivism which combine to trap many in a cycle of long-term or lifetime incarceration-related mobility and institutional ‘surveillance’. Incarceration-related mobility can therefore be considered an extension, or a more individualised form, of the burgeoning global surveillance of societies outlined by Urry in his consideration of individuals ‘on the move’ in the globalised world (Urry, 2000, 90).

The corollary to the above argument is that individuals should be subject to the consequences of their actions according to the requirements of law. In theory, and assuming the criminal justice system delivers appropriate and consistent responses to individual criminal acts, removing offenders to prison and faraway benefits the ‘immobile’ - those left at home and in the community who notionally are positively affected, at least in the short-term. Removal of violent offenders may, for example, immediately improve community and individual safety, health and functioning. Indigenous people are many times more likely to be hospitalised as victims of crime, and particularly crimes involving violence (Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, 2010). Moreover, incarceration serves as a long-standing Western approach to justice and dealing with criminality by uprooting and removing the cause. Therefore, in relation to individual motivations and offending, there may be complex and deep-seated issues at play, adding layers to the question of incarceration as a type of mobility and affecting individual motivations and behaviours.

3.1.2 High churn and return mobility

Beneath data showing high and increasing incarceration rates for Indigenous Australians is a further and vital distinction in relation to the nexus with mobility theory. Despite a greater proportion entering prison for acts of violence, Indigenous people living in remote areas on average do so with much shorter sentences (i.e. for relatively less severe crimes) than others. Data shows 60% of Indigenous prisoners in the Northern Territory in 2016 had sentences of two years or less compared to only 20% of others (ABS, 2016b). While ‘intent to commit’ or ‘committing violent acts’ account for more than a third of crimes, sentencing for driving related offences, breaching requirements of the legal system and other relatively minor offences are common (Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, 2010). This mirrors the situation in Canada where a study by Haslip (2000) established thirty percent of Aboriginal prison admissions were for unpaid fines.

Incarceration related absences from communities are re-enforced by very high rates of re-offending, estimated at 76% for Indigenous Australians compared to 49% for others (ABS, 2016). Shorter average sentence durations mean the incarceration and re-incarceration of remote living Indigenous people are keeping sub-sections of communities mobile; churning back and forwards between the home communities and prisons. This form of mobility is highly unpredictable since, although ex-incarcerated people worldwide are more likely to offend again, on an individual basis, through successful interventions or other means, re-offending may not occur. If it does, the timeframe is unpredictable. Incarceration-related mobility therefore incorporates unpredictability and elements of the unknown (in relation to past offenders and the pool of potential offenders) in the make-up of the mobile cohort and in the timing of mobility flows (or events).

3.1.3 The 'immobile' cohort

Home communities and the households affected by incarceration-related mobility may experience ongoing dislocations in the formation of households and income earning capacity as a result of churning triggered by what are, to the household, relatively unpredictable events (as noted above). Indigenous dwelling and household formations in remote areas feature much higher proportions of multi-household and multi-family occupancies, with the average household size at least double that of non-Indigenous households (for example, ABS, 2012b). Individual household compositions may change frequently, for instance, as children are cared for by extended family members. Incarceration mobility has the potential to add to the baseline of pre-existing high household mobility through the 'coming and going' of individuals as they are taken away to and return from prison, with the majority returning to their home community on release (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2001).

The immobile cohort is likely to face trauma directly as victims of crimes or as witnesses of crime prior to the incarceration-related absence of a household member through these events. On the one hand, incarceration is an end-point to what may have been unsavoury events and, with

the offender remove, the household is likely to be more functional and stable. However, with large numbers of individuals in remote households and high rates of incarcerations, there may be multiple and overlapping flows associated with the incarceration and release of individuals who permanently or temporarily reside in the household in question; such that households may rarely be stable at all (Prout, 2008).

3.1.4 Historical influences

Although an in-depth discussion of Australia's colonial history and the impacts on First Australians is outside of the scope of this study, understanding incarceration-related mobility also requires reflection on how and why post-colonial policies and institutions may relate to present day incarceration rates. The Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities (2010, 34), for example, ascribe the criminal justice system as the enforcement arm of colonial authority and power. Those who are mobile through incarceration are subordinate to the institutional contexts which determines, amongst other things, when they will be mobile and where they will travel. This contrasts with the freedoms that mass mobility has brought to the general populous that, as Urry (2000) denotes, has bought economic, social and cultural dividends to mobile individuals and society.

While the relative influence of the historical and institutional treatment of Indigenous people on present day incarceration rates might well be debated, it is reasonable to argue that they play some role in the decisions of individual decisions to commit crimes. This may also be a factor in individuals' choice to disengage from the criminal justice system (as opposed to committing a crime). The latter can include not meeting 'system' requirements such as paying a fine on time, which may in turn lead to further incarceration episodes.

3.1.5 Rites of passage?

A fourth and controversial aspect of incarceration-related mobility is the notion of incarceration as a 'rite of passage' or 'badge of honour'. This much-proffered concept in Australian criminal law, sociology and criminology circles is related to earlier discussion on individual motivations. The Australian Institute of Criminology (2001), for example, argues that crimes may be committed for self-actualisation purposes to replace 'initiation' process for Indigenous youth, in itself reflecting the breakdown of traditional laws and societal processes. The same study saw some prisoners reflecting on incarceration as a chance to experience something different to their marginalised life in small and isolated remote communities. While to the outsider the associations here may be uncomfortable, this aligns with global motivations and desires for mobility (particularly travel and tourism) for its capacity for self-satisfaction, actualisation, building knowledge, meeting people and generating alternative experiences (Urry, 2000).

3.2 What does it all mean?

Finally, having considered some aspects of incarceration-related mobility, we are left with the difficult question of "What does the mobility of an incarcerated individual represent for themselves, their homes and their communities?" Our discussion here suggests the answer may be specific to the circumstance or to the individual and their motivations for committing the offence. If for example, the motivation is incarceration as a 'rite of passage' then incarceration-related mobility is primarily symbolic in form, related in part to transport (away) and fulfilling perceived sociological and psychological requirements. Symbolic mobility is now globally accepted as providing status, individual esteem and pride (for example, Urry, 2000, 59). Mass vehicle and railway transport have enabled 'freedom' through mobility. Ironically, transport to and from custody for remote living Indigenous people is also facilitated by the motor vehicle or plane (there are no railways). Regardless, discussion on these aspects highlights the vastly complex layers, actors and meanings in considering incarceration-related mobility for remote living Indigenous

people. Each aspect listed here is clearly interrelated and interdependent, with the relative influence of each dependent on a complex set of circumstances. While a clear sense of complexity and impact for individuals, communities and society emerges from the literature and such theoretical discussions, what is missing is a sense of the scale of impact for communities themselves. Demographic estimation techniques can assist in providing a sense of scale and we now outline methods by which we can derive the scale.

7. Methods

To demonstrate the demographic scale and magnitude of impacts from Indigenous incarceration for individual remote communities we focus on men and women aged 20-39 years as these exhibit the highest incarceration rates of any age group and are a key group within a community for determining the community's demographic and social fabric. In this study we do not focus on any particular community, instead we estimate the range of likely impacts for a 'typical' community of 'average demographic structure'. This is done by estimating the size of a 'typical' community based on modified Census data and by undertaking an indicative analysis based on the characteristics of a Poisson distribution.

The Poisson distribution characterises the probability of observing any discrete number of events (i.e. 0, 1, 2, . . .), given an underlying mean count or rate of events, assuming that the timing of the events is random and independent (Osgood, 2000). In relation to crime, Osgood explains that the Poisson distribution for a mean count of 4.5, for instance, would describe the proportion of times that we should expect to observe any specific count of robberies (0, 1, 2, . . .) in a neighbourhood, if the "true" (and unchanging) annual rate for typical comparable neighbourhood were 4.5, if the occurrence of one robbery had no impact on the likelihood of the next, and if we had an unlimited number of years to observe. 'Counts' in the frame of this analysis is the percentage of men or women aged 20-39 who may be incarcerated at any given point in time. We assume that for the purposes of this indicative analysis the chances of one person being

imprisoned from a community are independent of the chances of any other person being imprisoned.

To calculate the results, we let the total number of males in this age range in NT communities be T with P of them in prison. Consequently, $M = (P/T)*100$ is the percentage of the population of 20-39 year old males in communities which is in prison (note T is not residents in the ABS sense but people who 'belong' to a community, i.e. both residents and people who happen to be away in prison).

Next we determine an average community size (C). We assume every community has the same age-sex distribution and that there are X% in each community who are males aged 20-39, implying that for the purpose of this analysis all 'communities' have identical demographic structures. This means that the number of 20-39 males normally 'living' in each community is $S = C*(X/100)$. Assuming that whether or not an individual is in prison is independent of whether any other person of that community is in prison, then the number of men aged 20-39 in that community who are actually in prison will follow a Poisson distribution with a mean estimated by F.

F can be estimated for a 'typical' community by simple substitution as

$$F = (M/100)*S = (((P/T)*100)/100)*(C*(X/100))$$

For our purposes we can approximate the Poisson distribution with a Normal distribution. Hence, a Poisson distribution with mean F is approximately described by a Normal distribution with mean F and variance F. For a Normal distribution, a 95% confidence interval is given by $(\text{mean} \pm 1.96*\text{sqrt}(\text{variance}))$. So for the Poisson distribution with mean F, a 95% confidence interval is approximated by $(F \pm 1.96*\text{sqrt}(F))$.

In order to calculate the mean and confidence intervals, we first needed to calculate values for the following variables:

- C (Average size of a community),
- T (Total number of males between 20-39 years in NT communities),
- P (Total number of males between 20-39 years of NT communities in prison) and
- X (Proportion of that age group in one community).

The average size of a community (C) was determined by taking the total number of people in remote Indigenous communities divided by the number of remote Indigenous communities. This number was derived using custom built tables in ABS TableBuilder. In order to approximately adjust for census counting errors and for people who did not state their Indigenous status, we increased the average size of a community by 19%, based on the estimated net undercount rate for the 2011 Census (ABS, 2012a).

The total number of males/females between 20-39 years in NT remote communities (T) was likewise derived from ABS TableBuilder and adjusted upwards by 19%. The total number of males/females between 20-39 years from remote communities in prison was estimated by first dividing the total number of males/females in that age group in remote communities by the total number of Indigenous males/females in the NT. It was then assumed that this proportion is similar to the proportion of males/females from remote communities being in prison. Finally, P was calculated by taking the ABS Prison Census data on Indigenous men/women in that age group in prison multiplied by the proportion of males/females living in remote communities. The proportion of males/females between 20-39 years old in one community (X) was determined by dividing the average number of males/females in that age group in an average sized community by the average size of a community.

8. Results

Based on the methods described above, the following formula for estimating the average number of men missing at any point from an average sized community applies:

$$F = (((611/6831)*100)/100)*(343*(16/100)) = 4.91$$

The 95% confidence interval is calculated as:

$$CI(u) = 4.9087+1.96*2.2155= 9.25$$

$$CI(l) = 4.9087-1.96*2.2155 = 0.57$$

Consequently, we can say that on average between 4% and 14% of men aged 20-39 years are away from their community and in prison at any given point in time. The formula for calculating the average number of women away from their communities is:

$$F = (((51/7380)*100)/100)*(343*(17/100)) = 0.40$$

The 95% confidence interval is calculated through the same formula as above:

$$CI(u) = 0.4029+1.96*0.6347= 1.65$$

$$CI(l) = 0.4029-1.96*0.6347 = -0.84$$

The approximate confidence interval mean number of women missing from an averaged sized community is therefore between 0% and 2%, since the Poisson distribution does not allow a negative count.

The above analysis undertaken for males and females yields the estimates as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Parameter estimates for 'missing' males and females

This leads to approximate estimates of the upper (u) and lower (l) 95% confidence intervals for the number of 'missing' Indigenous males and females from a 'typical' community (Table 3).

Table 3: Upper and lower 95% confidence interval analysis results

Consequently, taking into account the average community size, we can say that on average between 4 and 14% of Indigenous men aged 20-39 years may be away from their community and in prison at any point in time. Corresponding figures for Indigenous females are 0 to 2%.

9. Discussion and conclusion

In this study we have provided significant context on the pressing issue of incarcerations of remote living Indigenous Australians. This included addressing incarceration from the theoretical paradigm as a form of mobility and discussing several key aspects of this nexus, namely: Complex individual behaviours and motivations; High churn and return mobility; the ‘immobile’ cohort; historical influences and the question of whether, in some circumstances, incarceration may be a rite of passage. Discussion on these aspects highlights both the complexity and multi-layered factors driving and affecting incarcerations, and in turn how these relate to pre-existing mobilities, such as household mobility. With very little in the way of pre-existing literature on the nexus of incarcerations and mobility, our intention is this paper will trigger further discussion and research in this area.

Consideration of the theoretical aspects also demonstrates the cross-disciplinary nature of the issue. This is a reminder that improving the situation in a practical sense will also require multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and long-term programs and interventions. Many such programs were underway when the Senate Select Committee (2010) documented approaches by each State and Territory and some from overseas. It recommended those most likely to succeed would feature high input and representation from the community, such as the non-prison therapeutic community approach to changing offender behaviours. This involves community members actively participating in behavioural modification programs and mentoring of offenders. A further area of promise is the justice reinvestment approach (JR), identified by the Social Justice and Native Title

Report (2014) as an effective means for reducing incarceration rates. JR advocates for a portion of funds otherwise provided to the prison system be diverted to local communities where there is a high concentration of offenders and reinvested in services to address the underlying causes of crime at these communities. A review of JR by Wood (2014) suggests that a long-term commitment and a stable policy environment are important for success in the Australian context.

Our examination and profiling of recent data on incarcerations for Indigenous people in the NT of Australia and review of Australian and international comparative literature points to a range of likely social, cultural and intergenerational effects. With such high rates, and with many prisoners coming from remote Indigenous communities, the magnitudes of impacts for remote communities in the north of Australia and for individuals who are incarcerated are also likely to be far reaching. The international literature points to themes such as increased social dysfunction, diminished social and cultural capital, family stresses, crime and inter-generational impacts as just some of these.

Above all else, the aim of this study was to provide a sense of the scale of the demographic impact, or 'who's missing' for communities. To address the research question 'What proportions of Indigenous men and women might be 'missing' (away) in prison from remote communities in the NT at any point in time?', an indirect statistical approach was applied since there is no data available on incarceration numbers and characteristics for individual communities. Using a Poisson Distribution to estimate the proportion of 20-39 year-old residents as a means of demonstrating the scale of effects, our results indicate, on average, about 1 in 20 men and 1 in 200 women aged 20-39 from remote communities may be incarcerated at any point in time. However, for some communities these rates could be as high as 14% for men and up to 2% for women.

Such proportions are sufficient to suggest significant impacts on present and future population compositions and on population growth for individual communities. For example, the absence of males is likely to increase the proportion of single parent families. The absence of both

males and females aged 20-39 means that fertility rates are likely lower comparative to communities without such proportions incarcerated at any given point in time. Besides a rise in single parent households and a reduction in the number of newborns (from women and men in their prime child bearing years being in prison), incarceration represents another form of temporary out 'migration', with flow-on effects for the community including social and economic dysfunction.

Our analysis is necessarily based on a number of assumptions because of a lack of direct data. One key assumption made in the Poisson distribution is that the statistical chance of an individual from a community being incarcerated is independent from the number of others from that same community who are already in prison. In reality, it is reasonable to assume that communities with people already in prison may be more dysfunctional and likely subject to higher probabilities of other residents committing offences. Statistically, if this assumption was relaxed, the confidence intervals around our estimates would increase. This means that some communities in the NT may be subject to even higher proportions of people in prison than indicated in the Poisson distribution results. At the very least, the results of the Poisson numbers tangibly demonstrate the scale of mobility through incarceration and the churn which immobile residents 'left behind' must deal with.

Through their absence from communities, which are proximal to the conduct of cultural activities (for example ceremonies), incarcerations also impede participation in cultural practices and events. Links have been drawn in a range of academic literature between cultural participation and health outcomes in the context of remote Indigenous communities (for example, King, Smith and Gracey, 2009). Mental health is thought to be one key area where participation in cultural activities and cultural maintenance at the community level is important for more positive health outcomes for individuals, families and communities (Gone, 2013). The literature also highlights that imprisonment can have lasting inter-generational effects, particularly with a high

proportion of men (and possibly fathers) absent from their community taking with them the opportunity to be role models, father figures and mentors. Various prison programs have attempted to address this issue in Australia, such as the fathering program at Hakea Prison in Canning Vale, Western Australia (Western Suburbs Weekly, 2009), and the Brothers Inside project at the Cessnock Correctional Centre in New South Wales. These highlight the importance of the father role in communities and the significance of communication between incarcerated men and their children (Stuart & Hammond, 2010).

Importantly in examining community level impacts, individual incarcerations are by no means isolated events. They are overlaid onto complex systems of mobility involving high population churn. Rates of mobility into and from individual communities due to incarcerations are largely determined by the length of sentences individuals receive and rates of recidivism. With shorter sentences and higher recidivism rates, communities face substantial incarceration-related churn overlaid onto pre-existing circumstances of turnover being a significant part of everyday life (Taylor & Carson, 2009).

Finally, our study demonstrates the complex and multifaceted issues facing residents of remote Indigenous communities in the NT and northern Australia more broadly. Rising rates of incarcerations may be both a symptom of and contributor to historical and contemporary impacts from the effects of colonisation, disempowerment and breakdowns in traditional rules and norms. To help depict and understand some of these layers of complexity we now propose a framework which lays out community level impacts for Indigenous remote communities in the NT. The aim of the framework is to describe in simple terms the interrelationships between high incarceration rates and the resulting social, economic and demographic impacts found in our statistical analysis and the literature (Figure 3).

Figure 3. A framework to demonstrate community level impacts from incarceration

Source: Created by the authors

The starting point of our framework is the significant proportions of incarcerated people from remote communities at any point in time. These lead to specific demographic, social and economic impacts. On a broader level, these impacts can bring about the loss of social capital and the loss of social control, leading to greater dysfunction within the community and ultimately increased criminal behaviours. Augmented levels of criminal behaviour in turn contribute to higher numbers of incarcerated people. These interrelationships display the fierce cycle that high incarceration numbers found in remote communities can generate. While in essence this framework can be applied to any community, prior dysfunction in a community, such as in remote Indigenous communities, high incarceration rates and the location of the community, present critical factors in the extent of the effects.

At the moment, a range of 'Closing the Gap' targets are in place nationally to reduce disparities between Indigenous and other Australians in the areas of school attendance, life expectancies and work outcomes. The study here underlines Mick Gooda's call for the need for a social justice indicator as part of that strategy. A simple measure and target could be to reduce the gap in the imprisonment rates for 20-39 year olds during the next decade. It is difficult to understate the severity of the situation in light of the other targets, with progress towards individual targets (like life expectancy parity) all being negatively influenced in some way by the significant numbers revealed in this study. Further research is necessary to extrapolate the findings here and update the research based on new population estimates subsequent to the release of new data. The opportunity exists to project forward rates of Indigenous incarceration based on existing trends, in order to help ascertain likely financial, social and other impacts. In the meantime, as incarceration rates continue to increase, policy makers would be well served by considering the role of incarcerations for its effects on policies to improve health, education, employment and

wellbeing. It is difficult to argue that recent policies in these areas can gain traction without a significant turnaround in the rates and scale of impact outlined here.

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Table 1: Comparisons of United States and NT prison census data for 2013 and 2014

	United States	Northern Territory
Total number of prisoners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,574,700 as of December 31, 2013 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,494 as of June 30, 2014
Crude imprisonment rate per 100,000 adult population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 478 per 100,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 829 per 100,000
Share of ethnic groups in prison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37% non-Hispanic blacks • 32% non-Hispanic whites • 22% Hispanics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders • 14% non-Indigenous
Rate of ethnic group imprisonment per 100,000 adult population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 466 non-Hispanic whites per 100,000 • 2,791 non-Hispanic blacks per 100,000 • 1,130 Hispanics per 100,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 155 non-Indigenous per 100,000 • 2,390 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders per 100,000

Source: ABS, 2014a; ABS, 2015b; US Census of Bureau, 2015; Carson, 2014

Table 1: Parameter estimates for ‘missing’ males and females

Parameter estimates for NT Indigenous communities	Males	Females
C	343	343
T	6831	7380
P	611	51
X	0.16	0.17
F	4.91	0.40

Table 2: Upper and lower 95% confidence interval analysis results

	Average	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Males	4.9	0.6	9.3
Females	0.4	-0.8 (rounded to 0.0)	1.6

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