



Recidivism in the Northern Territory: Adult Prisoners Released in 2001-02

BASED ON A PRESENTATION TO THE CONFERENCE "SAFETY CRIME
AND JUSTICE: FROM DATA TO POLICY" JOINTLY ORGANISED BY THE
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INTRODUCTION

Background

The prisoner population in the Northern Territory has been increasing in recent years and a large proportion of the prison population are repeat offenders who have had prior imprisonment records. An effective way to curb the increase in prisoner numbers is to reduce the number of people from returning to prison after release.

This paper is developed to provide information to assist policy makers to develop policy to address the issue of increasing prisoner numbers through reduction of recidivism. It analyses the influence of age, Indigenous status, prior imprisonment, sentence length served prior to release and offence types have on the rate of prisoners returning to prison within two years after release.

Definition

Sentenced prisoners released to freedom and not subject to further supervision/contact with corrective services who return with a new term of imprisonment within two years are considered as recidivists.

Scope

Prisoners released to freedom during 2001-02.

Data Source

The data used in the paper was extracted from the Integrated Justice Information System (IJIS). This is an operational system administered by the Department of Justice, Northern Territory Government.

A unique identification number is assigned to an offender on his or her first formal contact with the criminal justice system in the NT. This number stays with the offender for life. This system is therefore capable of keeping an account of offenders' apprehension records, court proceedings/outcomes as well as their prison and community corrections episodes.

Exclusion

In mid 1999, there was a large influx of people smugglers into the Northern Territory prisons. The daily average number of people smugglers reached a peak of 136 in the December quarter 2001 which was 19% of the prison population and 50% of the non-Indigenous prison population. People smugglers are foreign nationals imprisoned for the transportation of illegal immigrants into Australia.

In 2001-02, 83 people smugglers were released from NT prisons and none have returned. People smugglers have impacted on the NT recidivism rate for 2001-02 in two ways. They deflated the overall recidivism rate from 40% to 36% and inflated the difference in recidivism rate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous prisoners from three times to five times.

This paper is developed to inform government policy about Territorian prisoners, therefore people smugglers are excluded from this study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The findings of this study have been summarised below:

- Of the 717 prisoners released in 2001-02, 288 (or 40%) returned to prison;
- The recidivism rate for Indigenous prisoners was 45%, three times the recidivism rate for non-Indigenous prisoners who recorded a recidivism rate of 15%;
- Indigenous prisoners aged between 25-34 years had the highest recidivism rate of all other subgroups of recidivists at 51%;
- 77% of Indigenous recidivists were under 35 years old;
- Prisoners with prior imprisonment returned at higher rates than those without prior imprisonment. (No prior 26%, one prior 48% and two or more priors 61%);
- Prisoners who served a term of imprisonment less than 6 months had a much lower recidivism rate than those who served a longer sentence. (less than 6 months 37%, 6 to 12 months 52%, 12 months or longer 48%);
- Prisoners released from a term of imprisonment for Assault had the highest rate of recidivism of all offence categories at 51%. The second highest recidivism rate was recorded for those who served a term of imprisonment for Drink Driving; and
- Prisoners released from a term of imprisonment for Assault also had the highest rate of recidivism for the same offence at 31%.

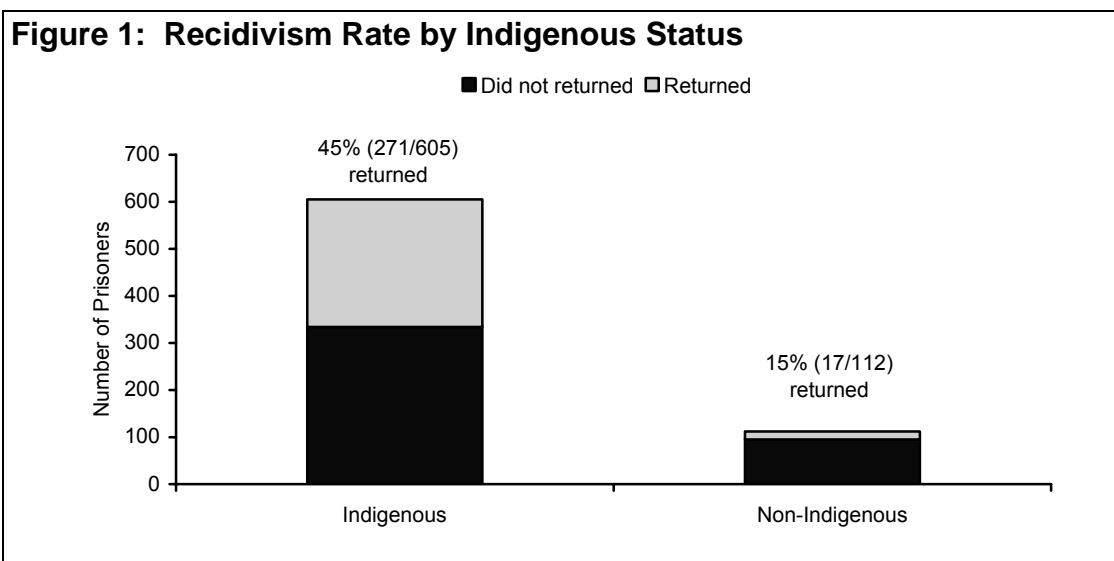
FINDINGS

Overall Recidivism Rate

Of the 717 prisoners released during 2001-02, a total of 288 prisoners returned to prison giving an overall recidivism rate of 40%. This compares to the national recidivism rate of 37%¹. The NT's recidivism rate would have been 36% if people smugglers were included.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous Recidivism Rates

As presented in Figure 1, the Indigenous rate of recidivism was 45%, three times the non-Indigenous rate of 15%. Of the total 288 recidivists, 271 (or 94%) were Indigenous compared to 17 (or 6%) non-Indigenous.

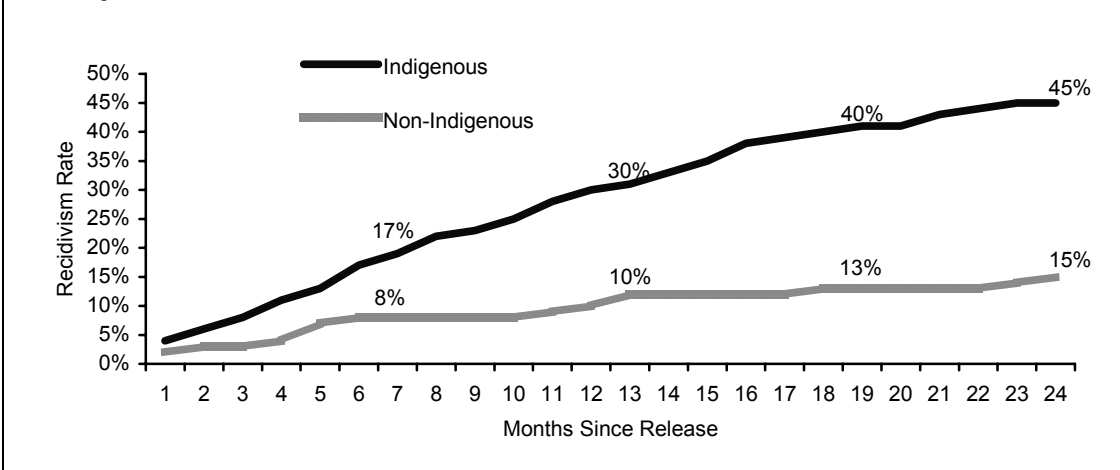


Recidivism Rate by Indigenous Status and Time Lapsed to Re-imprisonment

This section compares the recidivism rate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous prisoners by time lapsed to re-imprisonment. As shown in Figure 2 more than half of non-Indigenous recidivists returned within the first six months. In contrast, slightly over one third of Indigenous recidivists returned within the first six months. It appears that Indigenous recidivists continued to return at a steady rate while the return rate for non-Indigenous slowed considerably for the remaining 18 months.

¹ Figures from draft Corrective Services Attachment prepared for the Report on Government Services 2005.

Figure 2: Recidivism Rate by Indigenous Status and Time Lapsed to Re-imprisonment



Recidivists by Indigenous Status and Age Groups

Non-Indigenous recidivists comprised only 6% (17 of 288) of recidivists, it is therefore of no interpretive value to analyse such a small number by age cohorts. Figure 3 shows the distribution of Indigenous recidivists by age groups.

Indigenous prisoners aged “25-34” at time of release was the most prominent age group comprising 51% of Indigenous recidivists. The next most significant age group is “18-24”, which comprised 26% of Indigenous recidivists. It should be noted that the “18-24” age group is larger than it appears as it consists only a cohort of six years compared to ten for most other age groups. Of the 271 Indigenous recidivists 77% were less than 35 years of age.

Figure 3: Distribution of Indigenous Recidivists by Age Group

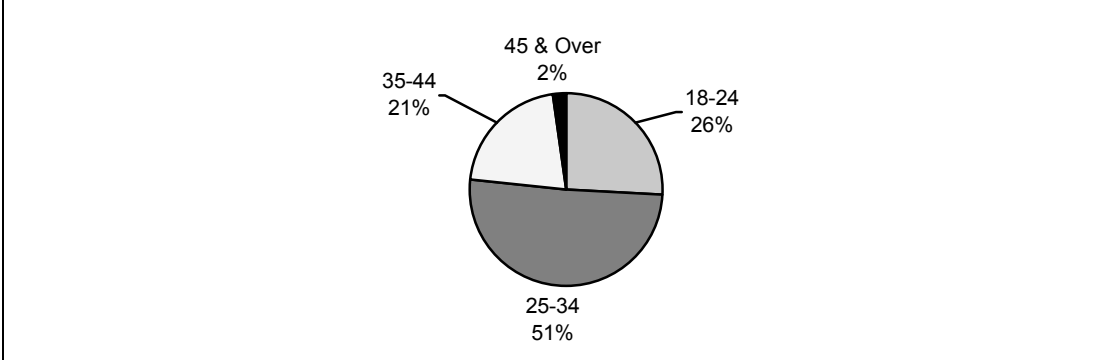
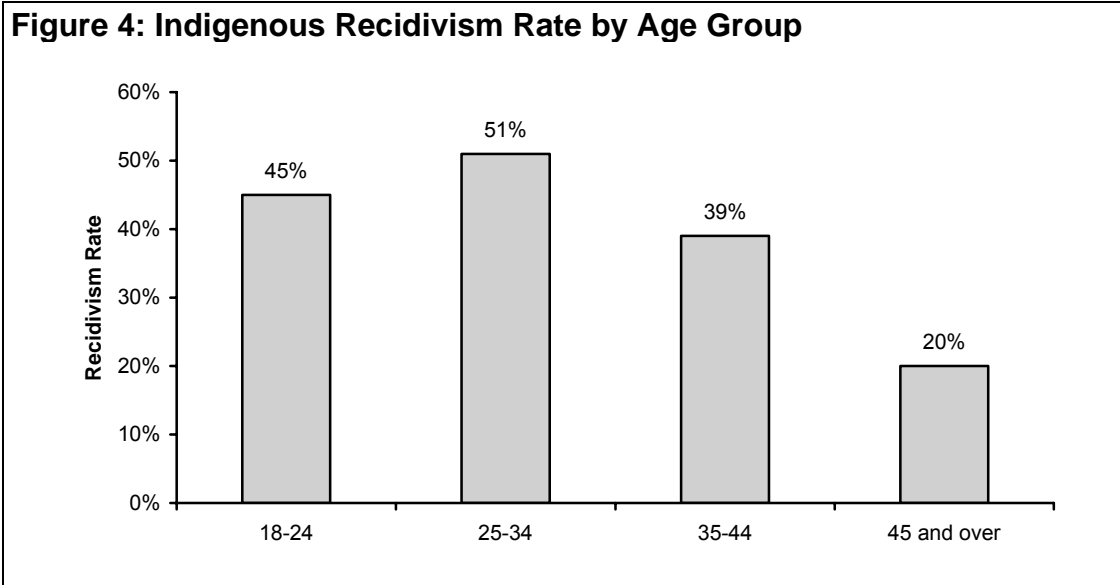


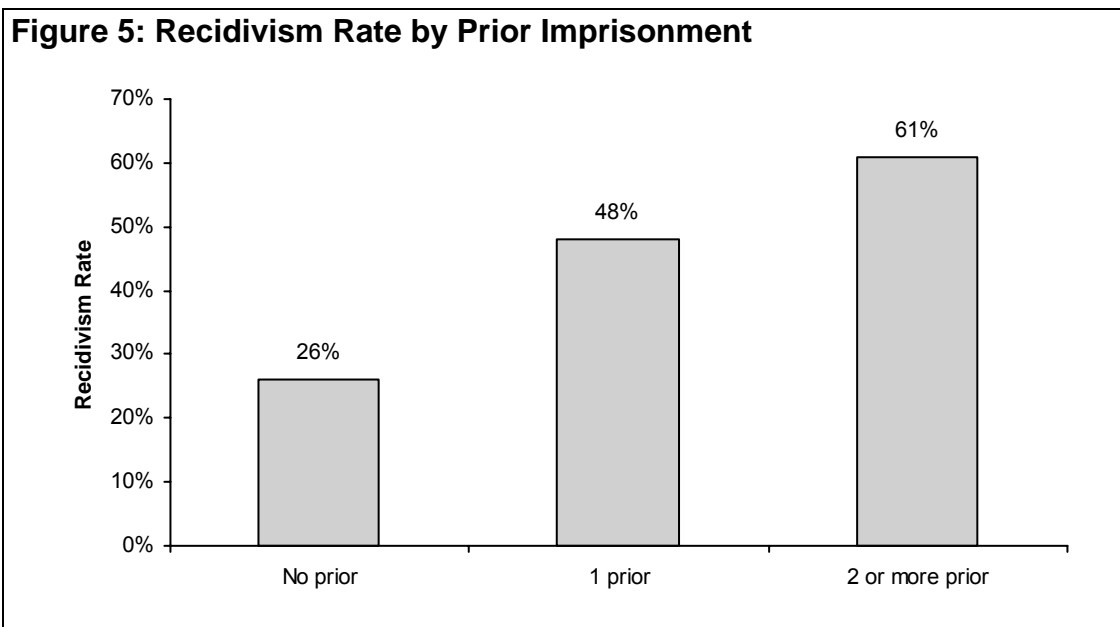
Figure 4 presents the recidivism rate for Indigenous prisoners by age cohort. The Indigenous prisoners recidivism rate ranged from 20% for the “45 and over” age group to 51% for the “25-34” age group. It suggests that as the offender gets older the probability of returning reduces despite the “18-24” age group having a slightly lower rate than the “25-34” age group.



Recidivism Rate by Prior Imprisonment

Figure 5 shows the differences in the recidivism rate of prisoners who have no prior sentenced imprisonment record, who have had one prior sentenced imprisonment record and two or more prior sentenced imprisonment record over the five years prior to their release.

Offenders who have prior imprisonment tend to have a higher probability of returning to prison within two years of release. The data confirm that once an offender gets into an offending cycle, it is difficult to break.

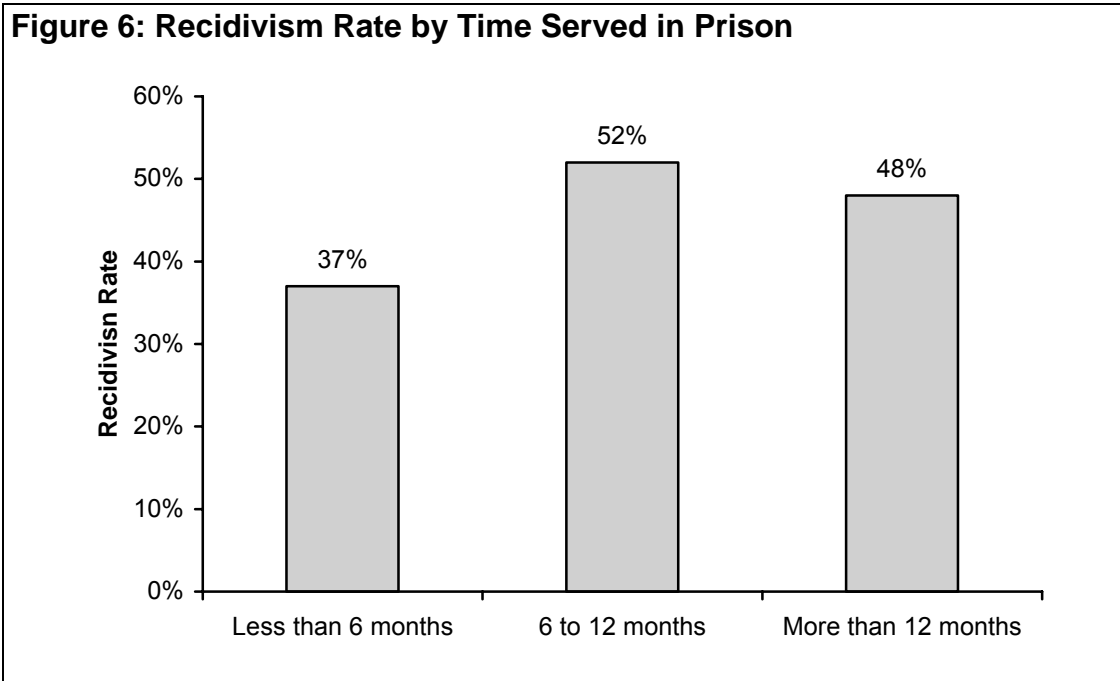


Note:

1. 'No Prior' may include prisoners who have an episode exceeding five years or were released from a juvenile detention centre.
2. Rates calculated using distinct number of persons released (given an offender can be released more than once, the subsequent episode(s) is used to determine priors, hence only one episode can be counted).

Recidivism Rate by Time Served in Prison

Figure 6 compares the recidivism rate of prisoners who served various lengths of time in prison. Prisoners who served a term of imprisonment of less than six months had a much lower recidivism rate than those who served a longer period. Those who served between six to twelve months and those served longer than twelve months had a similar recidivism rate.



Recidivism Rate by Offence Type (most serious offence)

Table 1 presents recidivism rate by offence type. A term of imprisonment often associates with a multiple of offences. In order to select an offence that represents a term of imprisonment, the most serious offence concept is used. Most Serious Offence is the offence that received the most severe sentence in a custodial episode.

The following analysis ignores offence categories that are associated with too few prisoners (less than 10 prisoners) as they may detract from the value of the findings.

Overall, prisoners who served a sentence for Assault had the highest rate of return at 51%. This is followed by Drink Driving (44%), Break and Enter (42%) and Driving offences (41%).

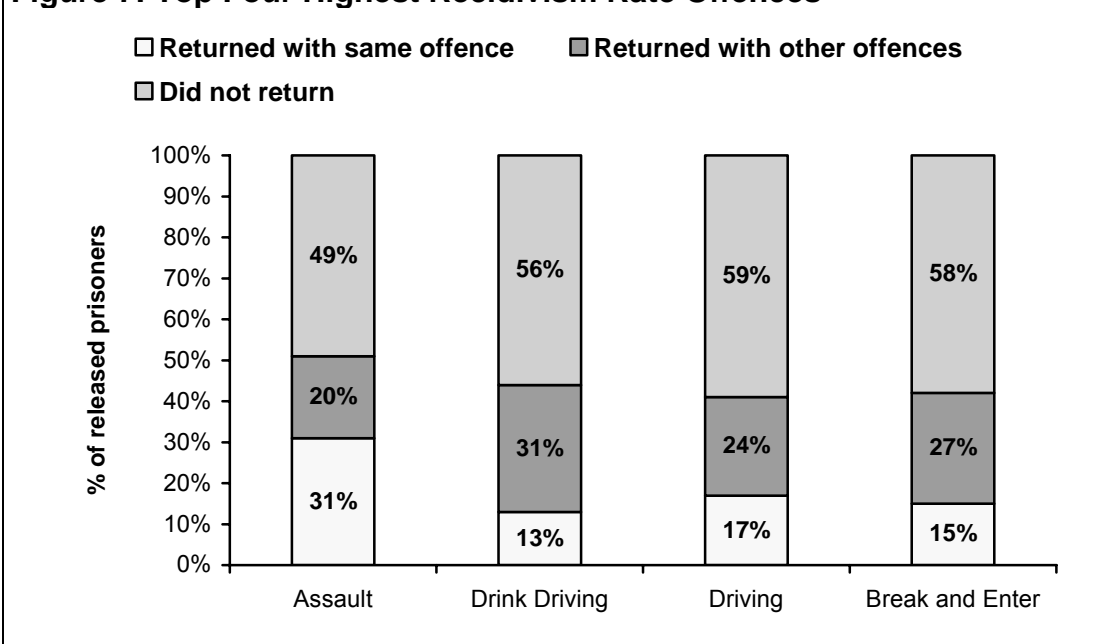
Prisoners who served a sentence for Drug related offences had the lowest rates of return at 5%.

Table 1: Recidivism Rate by Offence Type

Most Serious Offence (Episode on Release)	No. Released	Most Serious Offence on Return										Total Returned	
		Same MSO %	Against the Person %	Property %	Driving %	Other %	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Against the Person													
Manslaughter	3	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%
Assault	194	61	31%	3	2%	12	6%	12	6%	11	6%	99	51%
Sex Assault	5	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%	2	40%
Robbery	7	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Other Against Person	6	0	0%	1	17%	0	0%	0	0%	1	17%	2	33%
Property Offences													
Break & Enter	73	11	15%	3	4%	8	11%	3	4%	6	8%	31	42%
Motor Vehicle Theft	23	0	0%	2	9%	3	13%	0	0%	1	4%	6	26%
Other Theft	44	2	5%	1	2%	2	5%	2	5%	2	5%	9	20%
Property Damage	56	6	11%	8	14%	3	5%	3	5%	2	4%	22	39%
Other Property	11	0	0%	3	27%	1	9%	0	0%	0	0%	4	36%
Driving Offences													
Drink Driving	80	10	13%	8	10%	1	1%	16	20%	0	0%	35	44%
Driving	104	18	17%	9	9%	3	3%	11	11%	2	2%	43	41%
Other Offences													
Drugs	20	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5%	1	5%
Justice Procedures	41	4	10%	5	12%	3	7%	3	7%	0	0%	15	37%
Weapons	8	0	0%	2	25%	1	13%	0	0%	1	13%	4	50%
Public Order	26	1	4%	4	15%	2	8%	1	4%	2	8%	10	38%
Fraud & Deception	5	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%
Other	11	0	0%	0	0%	1	9%	1	9%	1	9%	3	27%
Total	717	114	16%	51	7%	40	6%	52	7%	31	4%	288	40%

Of the 717 prisoners released, 114 (or 16%) returned to prison for the same offence. Prisoners who served a sentence for Assault had the highest rate of return for the same offence at 31%. Driving offences had the second highest rate of return to the same offence at 17%, followed by Break and Enter (15%) and Drink Driving (13%).

Figure 7: Top Four Highest Recidivism Rate Offences



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrated that Indigenous prisoners are three times more likely to return to prison than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The Northern Territory Correctional Services administrative records show that over 75% of the NT prison population is Indigenous.

In accord with this information, the NT government has developed a range of programs aimed at reducing the recidivism among Indigenous people. They are:

- Re-integration programs
- Community Courts
- Violent Offender Related Programs
- Driving Offence Related Programs

Reintegration Program – Funded by Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission

The Reintegration Program is designed to reduce recidivism by building the capacity of remote communities to support people who have been released from prison. Whilst full implementation of the program is subject to finalisation, pilot projects have commenced within the Department of Justice. The Elders Visiting Program facilitates communication between offenders and those in the community to which they may return and maintains links to culture during incarceration. Elders are invited to visit offenders, establish the community's expectations and provide advice that can be built into release and rehabilitation strategies. This is complemented by a range of mechanisms implemented by the Department of Justice to aid the reintegration of prisoners into their home communities.

Community Court

The Darwin Community Court aims to provide more effective, meaningful and culturally appropriate sentencing options for offenders which will ultimately lead to lower rates of re-offending. This twelve month trial is modelled upon restorative justice practices utilised in specialist courts in other jurisdictions which have experienced reductions in recidivism. The model brings a number of stakeholders to the table to provide input into sentencing; notably respected community elders, the victim, and support persons for both the victim/s and offender. Although any offender fitting the criteria can request access to the Community Court, it is anticipated that the majority of offenders will be Indigenous.

Violent Offender Related Programs

Whilst there has been a traditional focus of service upon victims, a number of new programs are also focussing upon offenders. The Department of Justice is working with domestic violence perpetrators in order to reduce domestic violence and re-offending. The Indigenous Family Violence Offender Program is being delivered in four targeted communities to enhance the prospects of rehabilitation, and thus re-offending, for offenders within their community. The Indigenous Family Violence Program is provided to perpetrators of

Family/Domestic Violence who are imprisoned in Alice Springs and Darwin Correctional Centres. This program works with offenders to reduce the incidence of family/domestic violence, improve communication and anger management skills. In addition, the Family Well-Being program is offered to Indigenous prisoners located at Alice Springs Correctional Centre to support offenders to develop problem-solving and relationship skills to reduce family violence and related stress on family members.

Driving Offences Related Programs

Policy and programs are being developed to address the high rate of recidivism amongst offenders convicted of driving offences, and those in remote areas in particular. Through an arrangement supported by the Motor Vehicle Registry, Northern Territory Correctional Services, and Charles Darwin University, driver's training and licensing is provided to eligible adult prisoners at both Darwin and Alice Springs Correctional Centre. In recognition of the high rates of unlicensed drivers, this initiative provides instruction in theory and practice necessary to obtain a Learner's Permit and a full Driver's Licence.