A series of Research Briefs designed to bring research findings to policy makers

Conducting research with Indigenous people and communities

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Introduction

Past critiques of the social sciences focused primarily on the identity of the researcher and his or her relationship with the 'subject' Indigenous person, but over time more sophisticated and practical approaches have emerged related to participant-focused methodologies and design. More specifically, past research involving Indigenous people has been criticised as inherently biased and disempowering (Henry et al 2004; Davey and Day 2008; Kidman 2007; Sherwood 2010). Recent responses that seek to improve all forms of research practice involving Indigenous people in Australia and internationally, include funding for Indigenous-specific research institutes, dedicated funding for Indigenous academics and research networks, and ethical guidelines. Some of the most interesting and substantial Indigenous-led or informed research that has emerged in the past 20 years has often related to health, although such innovative approaches remain under-developed in the criminological domain. Today, Indigenous researchers argue the focus should be on working with Indigenous people who hold the knowledge and

expertise of their circumstances past and present, and on positive change (Smith 1999; Sherwood 2010).

This brief provides an overview of innovative and exemplary research approaches and practice undertaken with and by Indigenous communities that is relevant to crime and justice research. A number of critical questions guided this brief, including:

- What have been the research topics and methods undertaken in Australia in recent years on justice issues and Indigenous people?
- What constitutes good practice in criminological research and evaluation?
- What are some of the key considerations when conducting research with Indigenous people and communities?
- What should constitute good practice and what are examples?
- What are the main practical challenges associated with such practice?

The brief is divided into four sections, covering research practice and context, ethical frameworks and review processes, practical constraints and challenges, and promising practice. Where appropriate, examples are drawn from other countries, most notably New Zealand and Canada.

Research practice and context

The research 'business'

Research can be broadly divided into that which is investigator-driven and that which is policy-driven, with the former generating proposals through thesis work and academic interest that are submitted for funding whilst the latter arises primarily through commissioned projects and evaluations. Research institutions and funding bodies therefore play an important role in supporting locally-driven research and setting national priorities for research that incorporates Indigenous perspectives or supports Indigenous control or direction (Henry et al 2004).

In terms of crime and justice research, the main sources of government funding and the kind of research questions that preoccupy policy makers means that much of the research with Indigenous people relies on secondary analysis of administrative data and national surveys. Driven by governmental agreements at the national level, in Australia, the focus is on monitoring Indigenous over-representation in the criminal justice system and evaluations of programs and initiatives that seek to 'close the

gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Design and methodology

The objectives of the research determine the approach and methodologies adopted. Table 1 provides examples of crime and justice research, both investigator and policy-driven, that involve Indigenous people. As a general rule, the methods employed for population and system-oriented research are quantitative and utilise large scale surveys and secondary analysis of administrative data. Program evaluations typically involve the application of mixed method approaches and often rely on the triangulation of different data sources and methods, whereas place or person-centred research is predominantly qualitative research.

Participatory action research, whereby the research participants work alongside the researchers to determine the purpose and outcomes of the research, can be applied to all research activities irrespective of the methodology but is more likely to be found in in-depth, detailed studies of place and of individual narratives

or stories. The common attributes of collaborative and participatory approaches are described as shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation towards community action (Henry et al 2004).

A number of core values characterise good practice in social sciences, including respect for subjects or participants; voluntary participation; informed consent; and ensuring privacy and confidentiality. The overall design of the study should be transparent and entail the accurate use of information and data, with underpinning principles identified in the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (NHMRC et al 2007a). There are a number of ways these principles have been elaborated upon and applied that support research involving Indigenous people – specific ethical guidelines; specific funding for programs, institutions, positions and networks; and the development of specific approaches and methodologies. Several practical resources have also been developed for Indigenous researchers (for example, Laycock et al 2009; Laycock et al 2011).

The NHMRC (2003) describes the basic elements of the research process as: conceptualisation; development and approval; data collection and management; analysis; report writing; and dissemination. It is often within the context of the methodology that crucial distinctions are drawn between qualitative and quantitative methods, although it can be argued that irrespective of the method, at every stage there must be the opportunity to ensure Indigenous people control or have input into the process. Ethical guidelines are designed to provide frameworks that ensure appropriate consideration is given to ensure this occurs throughout the research process.

Ethical frameworks and review processes

Criminology has a history of conducting research on sensitive and difficult issues with marginalised and/or vulnerable groups and where participants may be involved in offending. In the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement) (NHMRC et al 2007b) section 4.6

Table 1: Examples of Australian crime and justice research involving Indigenous people

	Population	System	Program	Place	Person
Key Characteristic	Large scale surveys of population/sub-population samples to investigate their perceptions and experiences	Various dimensions and the effect of the system is assessed through the analysis of criminal justice data (including court records)	Mixed methodology to evaluate a program or initiative	Context of place informs the research	Small number of participants communicating their experience
Examples	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) - ABS (2009) Survey of over 1,300 Indigenous people in remote Australia - Shaw and d'Abbs (2011)	Analysis of criminal justice data - Harding et al (1995) Analysis of court data - Beranger et al (2010) Analysis of court cases - Davis et al (2010)	Evaluation of a program in a remote community - Colmar Brunton (2012) Evaluation of Murri courts - Morgan and Louis (2010)	Research on crime in different regional towns - McCausland and Vivian (2009) Research on service delivery in a remote community - Lovell et al (2012)	Interviews with offenders - Daly and Proetti-Scifioni (2011) Group discussions about anger - Davey and Day (2008) Conversations with people in remote Australia - Gibson (2009)
Methods	Quantitative ————————————————————————————————————→ Qualitative				

refers to the ethical and legal issues that may arise in research where participants or others may be involved in current or future illegal activities. A guiding principle is that the benefits of the study should outweigh the risks to participants and the researcher. The important point is made that the participants should not have unrealistic expectations of benefit from their participation.

Indigenous people are often both victim and offender (Bryant and Willis 2008). For participants who have been victims there may be concerns surrounding their personal safety and the risk of causing further distress through the research process. In such circumstances, the onus is on the researcher to ensure that, at a minimum, there is access to information about appropriate and accessible services that the participant can seek help and advice from.

Australian guidelines highlight the need to respect and support research participants, with additional elements and nuances found in ethical guidelines for research with Indigenous people and communities. According to the National Statement (NHMRC et al 2007b), all research involving Indigenous peoples must be reviewed and approved by a registered Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The HREC

process must include assessment by or advice from people who have networks with and/or knowledge of research with Indigenous peoples; and people familiar with the culture and practices of the people with whom participation in the research will be discussed (NHMRC et al 2007b). There is also an expectation that the application will explain how it will address the core values and principles articulated in the NHMRC (2003) guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, even if it is not a medical or health-focused study.

Common themes are apparent in ethical guidelines for research with Indigenous peoples in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement on ethical conduct defines the core ethical value as respect for human dignity that is expressed in three principles – respect for person, concern for welfare, and justice (CIHR et al 2010). Table 2 presents core values and principles for ethical conduct in human research (NHMRC et al 2007a), in health research with Indigenous people (NHMRC 2003), and for good practice in social policy research and evaluation in New Zealand (SPEaR 2008). Unlike the Australian code for responsible research (NHMRC et al 2007a), the New Zealand good practice guidelines

(SPEaR 2008) are explicitly aimed at government officials who design, commission and/or manage research and evaluation, and include a chapter on how to apply these principles to research with Māori people informed by consultations and workshops (SPEaR and AnZEA 2007). In all these guidelines, emphasis is placed on respect and integrity, and with Indigenous people, reciprocity.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (2012) has recently revised its ethical guidelines for Indigenous Australian studies. Informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and United Nations conventions related to intellectual property and cultural heritage, the guidelines emphasise the rights of Indigenous people to self-determination, cultural knowledge and heritage, as well as listing various principles related to good practice.

A continuum of Aboriginal people's involvement and participation in research is outlined in the Canadian Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People (CIHR 2007), with practical illustrations ranging from research that directly and exclusively involves Aboriginal people to a study of an inner city neighbourhood where Aboriginal people are a sizeable proportion of the larger community. Given there may not necessarily be a homogeneous or a unified view of the process and its outcomes, the Canadian guidelines refer to careful negotiations and handling with for example: safeguarding participant privacy, which may require special measures with the sharing of research information with community organisations etc; and identification of place, which should be negotiated with participants, partners and/or collaborators.

Practical constraints and challenges

Challenges for researchers

Although no-one would argue with the core values and principles underpinning the current Australian guidelines, there has been a range of criticisms made about the process of

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Table 2: Principles of ethical conduct and good practice research

General principles for ethical conduct in human research (NHMRC et al 2007a)	Values and principles for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research (NHMRC 2003)	Principles of good practice social policy research and evaluation (NZ) (SPEaR 2008)
Honesty and integrity	Reciprocity	Respect
Respect for participants	Respect	Integrity
Good stewardship of public resources	Equality	Responsiveness
Appropriate acknowledgment of the role of others	Responsibility	Competency
Responsible communication of results	Survival and protection	Reciprocity
	Spirit and integrity	

ethics approval in Australia (Graham 2011; Kidman 2007; Sherwood 2010). Considerable time may be required to plan and develop a partnership or collaborative arrangement with Indigenous communities or organisations and to obtain letters of support from key representatives prior to submitting an application. For example, Coram (2011) describes a 12-month application process to obtain approval from an ethics committee, for a small scale study of a community project involving young people.

Based upon researchers' reflections of their experiences, it is evident that there are often gaps between the theory of good research and practice (Blagg 2011; Davey and Day 2011; Sherwood 2010; Williams et al 2011). Despite the best of intentions, there are inherent tensions between a commitment to the principles of participatory and ethical research and the expectations of funding agencies and academia. Strict adherence to ethical guidelines and research protocols does not necessarily translate into day-to-day good practice. Nor may there be the funding, capacity and timeframe to allow all parties to devote the energy and resources to follow through on the ideal.

From a non-Indigenous perspective, the research process can be difficult, subject to change and negotiation over time and the ceding of control and re-orientation in thinking (Coram 2012; Davey and Day 2008; Nicholls 2009). Blagg (2011) states that researching in the Aboriginal domain is never easy or straightforward, whether working with an Aboriginal urban group or in a remote community. Sherwood (2010) (herself an Indigenous researcher) found a common refrain amongst the Aboriginal people she talked with, was that researchers did not 'listen' and did not get the story 'right'. As she underlines, being able to listen and hear is an active process that requires openness and can be discomforting. Another risk, according to Davey and Day (2008), is that of over-identification or romanticism, and reifying the construct of Indigenous identity or reproducing stereotypes.

For Indigenous researchers, there can be significant challenges and difficulties associated with being placed in a cultural brokerage role. Sherwood (2010) refers to tensions related to Indigenous researchers' responsibilities to their community and the aim of making research a safe and beneficial process for Indigenous people, whilst working within a western academic environment. There is a lack of documented perspectives from community-based researchers, and accounts of the strengths they bring to the research process. Canadian research, however, suggests those who have been directly involved certainly have more positive attitudes about research than those who had only heard about research in the community (Edwards et al 2008).

Who benefits?

Academic research has certain values and practices that are continually reinforced through the definition and recognition of 'experts' and their role in peer review of funding assessments and acceptance of research products (Sherwood 2010). In many circumstances, funding applications and research outputs are still assessed in terms of scientific quality not social benefit (Henry et al 2004), although this is changing with the NHMRC grant guidelines for medical and health research with Indigenous communities now requiring applicants to demonstrate community engagement, capacity building and benefit. The question of benefit – short term to participants and to collaborators and partners – and longer term, to Indigenous people and social science is not always easy to determine and to agree upon, let alone deliver.

Challenges of community-based collaborative approaches include the agenda for research, the power differentials, and ownership and identity of the research project, with political dimensions to the process and outcomes (Edwards et al 2008). Other challenges may relate to the scepticism and resistance from Indigenous gatekeepers (Davey and Day 2008) and as Blagg (2011) points out, the needs of non-Indigenous researchers may not be a priority in Indigenous communities.

There can be different notions of accountability – to the funding body, to the university and the scientific community – which may be sometimes at odds with the need to be accountable and respectful of Indigenous cultural priorities. Davey and Day (2008) found this occurred during data collection – with the non-Indigenous researchers seeking to ensure compassionate professional distance whilst Indigenous colleagues wanted to assist and counsel the men, mindful of the wellbeing of participants. Coram (2011) found that she was criticised for not recording 'negative' observations in her research but she argues she could not retain the trust of the community if she did so.

Evaluation challenges

Much of the research that Indigenous people have experienced relates to evaluations, and may be largely a consultation process. As Williams et al (2011) stress, the AIATSIS guidelines on Indigenous research do not deal specifically with evaluation, despite the particular challenges surrounding evaluations of programs and initiatives that involve Indigenous people. The common business model for evaluations adopted by governments is to contract external or independent groups to undertake the work with the specifications, including the timeline, determined by the contracting party. Collaborative and participatory research methodologies do not lend themselves to short timeframes. They also note that they are relatively easy to talk about but difficult to do. There are limited resources, and limited time to develop the trust and confidence at the heart of true partnerships.

Research instruments

There may be serious flaws in standard research instruments that require adaption or redesign (Anderson 2008). Survey questions are asked slightly differently in remote and non-remote contexts in NATSISS (ABS 2010), and Blagg (2008) refers to the development of a community safety questionnaire that required reformulating questions about safety and social problems. This initial work was further built upon in a large scale survey of community safety and wellbeing in remote communities (Shaw and d'Abbs 2011).

In certain contexts, due regard should

be given to language and the need to include interpreters and/or involve local language speakers. Recognition that there may be participants with hearing impairments is also important. Due to the prevalence of hearing loss and middle ear disease among Indigenous people in Australia, a web-based 'one stop shop' has been developed, which includes information and resources on the subject (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet and Menzies School of Health Research 2012).

Promising practice

There is no definitive Indigenous research model or methodologies. Instead, various guidelines and commentaries underline the need to incorporate or ensure Indigenous involvement or control over the enterprise. The focus is on the need for reorientation and adaption of the research business, and in its practice, of researchers' worldviews and of standard methodologies and instruments. According to Blagg (2011) fundamental protocols pertain to any research in the Indigenous domain – cultural sensitivity, willingness to partner and to involve communities in both processes and outcomes, and that Indigenous people see some benefits from the research.

In New Zealand, the Kaupapa Mâori research institute has a considerable track record in undertaking education research as well as evaluations of criminal justice initiatives (Tuhiwai Smith and Cram 1997; Cram et al 1999). Kaupapa Mâori (Mâori 'ground rules') underpins their research, which is described as an approach that does not exclude the use of a wide range of methods but rather signals the interrogation of methods in relation to cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural reliability, and useful outcomes for Mâori.

Participatory and collaborative research

Community-based participatory research has been increasingly adopted as a way to build partnerships between Indigenous communities, research institutions and governments and to increase Indigenous community participation and control in research (Edwards et

al 2008). The focus is on collaborative teams, the incorporation of academic and community knowledge, and outcomes that can contribute to positive change. In relation to crime and justice research, potential partners include community-based or oriented justice initiatives or services such as legal services, victim support services, healing and wellbeing centres, night patrols, Indigenous courts, and community justice groups (for example, Pilkington 2009; Taylor and Putt 2007).

A key question for Davey and Day (2008) was finding a method that enabled Indigenous voices to emerge. They found it was a constant struggle and although they would argue their research practices were not oppressive it did not mean fundamental asymmetries were eliminated. Ongoing dialogue about intentions, values and assumptions throughout the research process seems essential in any collaborative or partnership arrangement (CIHR et al 2010).

At a practical and local level, the central role of Elders is underlined by Sherwood (2010) who she believes can help Indigenous and non-Indigenous research to be respectful and to generate an ethical dialogue with another worldview. She outlines a series of steps, to create what she calls a decolonisation framework, which begins with an acknowledgement that the researcher does not know it all. Respect leads to an openness and comprehension that lends itself to collaboration and the building of trusting relationships and reciprocal obligations.

Participants' trust and confidence in the research process can be enhanced through the engagement of community-based researchers (Edwards et al 2008). Community-based researchers can have a crucial role in every step in the research process, and may ask for and/or need additional support to deal with the demands placed on them. The fostering and support of networks of Indigenous researchers in communities and within institutions is happening in Australia to some extent (for example, Lovell et al 2012; Sherwood 2010).

Reflecting on over a decade of

research in Canada on resilience amongst Indigenous peoples, Anderson (2008) provides an example of a partnership with 12 Aboriginal women's shelters across Canada that had academic rigour and employed community-led approaches based on non-disclosure of traditional knowledge. Practical suggestions include:

- More robust and documented 'network' sampling in urban contexts, which are followed up over time.

- Quantitative research that generates policy oriented evidence of outcomes. He found communities were interested in this type of research, arguing that qualitative research mainly assists non-Aboriginal researchers to understand the context and Aboriginal worldviews.

- Investment in "tools for sharing and socialization of evidence" including stakeholder meetings, presentations, videos, comics, radio coverage and scientific publications.

- Building Aboriginal skills and confidence to lead research so that Aboriginal researchers have the capacity to balance self-reflective cultural investment and practice with non-Indigenous empirical research methods (Anderson 2008).

Urban Indigenous populations are dispersed and diverse, and although only one quarter of the Australian Indigenous population live in remote and very remote communities, much of the Australian research on health and social issues has been undertaken in remote communities (Pyett et al 2009). Based on extensive experience in public health research, Pyett et al (2009) make a series of suggestions for engaging with Indigenous communities in an urban context, including approaching a peak body relevant to the research topic for advice on who to consult, formalising the collaborative relationship through a memorandum of understanding, and ensuring appropriate acknowledgements of contributions (and co-authorships where possible).

In addition to acknowledging multiple contributors to research, it is always important to consider the ownership, transfer and dissemination of research findings. Meaningful feedback is likely to require a range of products and processes, tailored to particular stakeholder groups (Williams et al 2011). In commissioned research or evaluation, there can be a provision included in the contract for shared ownership through sub-licensing arrangements, an example being the community safety and wellbeing study involving a total of 17 remote communities (Shaw and d'Abbs 2011). An example of an intellectual property and Indigenous knowledge protocol is provided by Orr et al (2009).

Australian crime and justice research

Of the limited literature available that documents researchers' experiences, most relates primarily to investigator-driven, discrete community-based studies and in-depth qualitative research. Table 3 includes examples of crime and justice research involving Indigenous people and communities that has sought to apply some core values, and various approaches that have been adopted to produce concrete benefits and meaningful research products. However, it is acknowledged that these approaches are less likely to occur in large scale surveys, evaluations, and commissioned research projects. A resource such as the New Zealand guidelines for government officials on how to apply good practice research principles to commissioned research with Mâori communities (SPEaR 2008) would be valuable in the Australian context.

Conclusion

With the development of ethical guidelines and good practice frameworks, research should, and is, more likely to adhere to a core set of principles, related to integrity, respect, reciprocity and mutual benefit. This has not however translated into major transformations of the research business, more in the conduct of research practice. Some of the more promising developments relate to collaboration and building networks of researchers, and local

engagement strategies. More strategic approaches are required to ensure active participation of Indigenous people throughout the entire research process.

Within Australian jurisdictions and on a national scale, regular agenda setting for research on crime and justice issues should be undertaken with Indigenous people through the setting of institutional research and funding priorities. Improving mechanisms to integrate such research into crime and justice policy and practice could include building knowledge networks and brokers similar to that found in the health domain (Benham 2012).

Further investment is required that

incorporates sufficient resources and time to enable the building of partnership or collaborative approaches, and experimentation in method and product. An illustration is the funding of $1.2 million over three years for 23 community research projects in remote locations that to date has resulted in local capacity building and published reports (eg. Lovell et al 2012; Colmar Brunton 2012).

Arguably crime and justice research with or involving Indigenous people poses particular challenges. For many, it implies a focus on negative issues and exacerbates politicking around particular public anxieties. As a result, there has been a marked reluctance in the research community

Table 3: Examples of promising practice in crime and justice research in Australia

Values	Key element(s)	Examples
Culturally appropriate	Alternative methodologies such as narratives/'yarning'	Conversational method - Kovach (2010) Story-telling - Gibson (2009)
Indigenous engagement or control	Direction and management of research including joint 'ownership', reference groups, partnership approaches	Research by an Aboriginal legal service - Pilkington (2009) Research with sexual assault centres - Taylor and Putt (2007) Reference group – Davey and Day (2008)
	Investment in local capacity and networks	Building capacity in a remote community - Lovell et al (2012) Employing networks of local Indigenous researchers in remote communities - Shaw and d'Abbs (2011)
Reciprocity (and benefits)	Providing or enabling individual and community benefits	Assistance with community activities and projects Training and resources/ ongoing relationships (Lovell et al 2012)
	Communicating results to participants, communities and specific groups – eg visual forms	Story-boards/video clips/ DVDs (Colmar Brunton 2012) Community reports/individual transcripts (Shaw and d'Abbs 2011)

to undertake crime and justice research directly involving Indigenous people, especially in urban settings. Instead, much of what has been produced by research bodies has involved system-oriented studies and/or commissioned evaluations of reforms. Some would argue that the politics make it too hard, the hurdles too great and the benefits negligible, but to opt out leaves space for inquiries, consultations, and media stories to inform public debate and government policy, uninhibited by the standards, core values and ethical principles of good research practice.

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