



# Auckland Women's Centre QUARTERLY

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## Women in our Prisons

By Ruth Busch

Another jam-packed meeting, no empty chairs, people (the vast majority women) spilling outside into the chilly night, huddled together wrapped in blankets and craning their ears, not wanting to miss a word of the three speakers' kōrero. As in the previous two forums held at the Centre, Papatuanuku Nahi karanga-ed to begin the meeting. It set the tone for the most challenging and gripping discussion of the three forums to date, this one on Women and Prisons.

The entire forum was fascinating. The work of Tracey McIntosh especially moved me. Because of its importance to me, I have chosen to divide my discussion of the forum into two parts. Section one is devoted to the ideas of Tracey McIntosh. In our next newsletter I will discuss Emmy Rāketē, No Pride In Prisons, and JustSpeak's Johanna McDavitt's analyses. They afford important insights, and their ideas need to be given sufficient space.

**Tracey McIntosh, an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Auckland, began her talk by setting out statistical data demonstrating today's mass incarceration of Māori in Aotearoa/NZ. Māori have one of the highest rates of imprisonment in the world.**

In September 2013, Māori constituted 50.6% of the total New Zealand prison population. This represented about 4,000 Māori men (50+%) and close to 400 Māori women (60+%) in prison either on remand or post-sentencing.

From 1986 to 2009, the number of women in prison has increased by 297%, almost twice the rate of the growth for men, and Māori women are the fastest growing prison population (in fact, right through the criminal justice system). In terms of young women aged 17 to 24 years, Māori represent nearly 75% of these female inmates.

Within this litany of negative numbers, Tracey (and Emmy after her) underscored that the overwhelming majority

of Māori women prisoners had experienced sexual and physical violence as well as a myriad of other forms of abuse long before they entered prison. One needed only to hear Emmy describe how often and repeatedly male corrections officers strip search women prisoners to comprehend that non-consensual sexual contact (which in any other venue would be deemed criminal) is carried out every day in our women's prisons. The fact that most of these inmates have been sexually abused at some time(s) in their lives, frames strip searches in a different, much more violent way.

Tracey emphasises that societal narratives of prison silence and undercut the empathy that might lead us to work for the abolition of prisons. In a neoliberal environment, prisons are necessary. What goes on within them is behind closed doors. As women, we know full well the innumerable forms of violence that can be meted out behind them. And how, as Andrea Dworkin has previously pointed out to us, the naming question (why did the violence occur?) always results in a victim blaming answer (because you deserved it).

*Continued over page*



*Pictured: Tracey McIntosh*



## Women in our Prisons, continued

One of the most interesting parts of Tracey's talk involved a discussion of historical trauma theory and its significance for indigenous populations. Mass incarceration is situated along a continuum of Māori experiences of colonisation.

Tracey emphasises that historical trauma theory is not an attempt to re-cast Māori as victims but aims instead to develop tikanga-based solutions to current problems (including incarceration) which are so negatively affecting Māori whānau and communities.

Historical trauma theory also allows for the critique of societal ideologies and government policies which contribute to the continuation of these traumas and/or present barriers to overcoming them, thereby sabotaging the development of resilience.

The evening didn't provide many answers but it did provide a process: Give voice to the stories that subvert the racist narratives of deficit and despair; name the

current formulations of colonisation including mass incarceration; recognise that all people have value; understand that solutions to contemporary issues are to be found by Māori in tikanga, by all of us in stories that demonstrate gender equality, that eschew power and control tactics for relationships based on freedom and power sharing. Who benefits from anything less?

The takeaway of the night was Emmy's: "Direct action with three people is not enough." Agreed. We need to take action collectively, change the narratives, empower the voiceless to tell their truths, write the wrongs. In 1963, I first heard the Afro-American folk singer Odetta sing the following words at a demonstration to protest the killing of four young girls in the bombing of a black church in Birmingham Alabama:

*One man's hands can't tear a prison down,  
Two men's hands can't tear a prison down,  
But when two and two and fifty make a million,  
We'll see that deed be done!*

Bring it on! ■

## Feminists Are Funny

*Auckland Women's Centre Fundraiser*

**Sunday 21 August**

**7.30pm at  
The Classic  
Comedy Club**

**Tickets \$35  
from Eventfinda**



**WSA(NZ)  
Pae Akoranga Wahine  
CONFERENCE 2016**

### Re/generation:

**New landscapes in feminism and Women's Studies**

**University of Auckland  
September 2-3**

*Speakers include*

Ngahua Te Awetokuku  
Priya Kurian  
Ngaire Kerse  
Tracey Macintosh  
Katherine Ravenswood  
Elisabeth McDonald  
Rosemary Hunter  
Tess Moeke-Maxwell

*Panels on*

**Gender, generation and care  
New directions in justice  
Sustainability and feminist  
theory**

*Dinner and social with  
DJ Tina Turntables*

*Deadlines*

Workshop, paper, panel, poster &  
performance proposals - June 30  
Earlybird registration - August 1

[wsanzconf2016@gmail.com](mailto:wsanzconf2016@gmail.com)  
[www.wsanz.org.nz](http://www.wsanz.org.nz)



# Do young women have it “easy these days”?

By Hannah Reynolds, a Member of the National Council of Women (NCW) representing the Abortion Law Reform Association New Zealand. This article is a version of a speech Hannah presented at the recent Community Hui organised by NCW Auckland in partnership with the Auckland Women's Centre on NCW's NZ Gender Equality Strategy.

I sometimes encounter the attitude that young women today know nothing of the struggle that has gone before. To me, this creates a competitive perspective that is exhausting and a divisive distraction.

There is no doubt that the experiences of women today differ from those 50 years ago. But we have not achieved equality, and many of the same obstacles persist. For example, young women are active participants in the workforce, but we have not overcome the wage gap, are under-represented in leadership roles and are not adequately supported as parents. Marital rape is now a crime, but domestic violence rates remain high in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Patriarchy and kyriarchy continue to oppress women. Mainstream feminism has, however, gained a more intersectional lens. It now works to support a diversity of voices from marginalised communities and different classes, including non-white, queer, disabled and transgender. An intersectional lens helps understand how the issues addressed below affect people differently, based on privilege and oppression.

The following is by no means a comprehensive list of issues young women are facing; it is simply a summary of my discussions with contemporaries. Many of them are also encountered by people who are not young women. However, young women are especially vulnerable to these issues, and they raised the following with me:

## HAUORA (WELL-BEING)

**Mental health:** Factors that impact on mental health include sexism/misogyny, family and intimate-partner violence, addiction, bullying, colonisation, ageism, and addiction. These issues can lead to depression, self-harm and suicide.

**Body image:** Fat-phobia and disordered eating are not uncommon, and young women report being judged for their food choices and clothing. The lack of state support services for young people developing problematic relationships with food has wider ramifications and can lead to further issues down the track.

**Sex education:** Access to contraception (especially long-term), abortion and Family Planning waitlists continue to challenge young women today. Young mothers require greater support around maternal healthcare and access to education and welfare. The lack of sufficient education around healthy relationships and consent have negative consequences for all people, but especially young women. Rape culture, slut-shaming, sexual assault and sexual violence exist.

## TUAKIRI (IDENTITY)

**Gender and sexuality:** The lack of understanding and support for transgender and queer youth, including those identifying as neither man nor woman, contributes to the high rates of self-harm and suicide in transgender youth and impacts on their ability to gain education, employment and housing. Homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, cis-centric and heteronormative attitudes (“have you got a boyfriend?”) are also prevalent and detrimental.

**Racism/culture, ability and class:** These issues are very visible in colonised Aotearoa New Zealand, at least to those who experience them! I do not mean to conflate these issues, nor suggest they are always linked. However, many young people I spoke with considered these factors to impact on their experiences of poverty and struggles within the justice system.

**Migrants/refugees:** The young migrants and refugees I spoke with desire more information regarding opportunities for education and employment, particularly the transition from high school to university. Cultural differences can sometimes mean that young migrant or refugee women are unable to participate in activities without certain conditions, and this is sometimes misunderstood by mainstream



Pictured: Hannah Reynolds

New Zealanders as oppressive cultural restrictions. Efforts to include and support young migrants and refugees might be as simple as offering a certificate of attendance to verify their presence at an event, or hosting a women-only swimming session. Other issues include racism, domestic violence and climate change.

## UMANGA (CAREER)

**Issues:** The professional ‘norm’ is typically a white, straight, able-bodied, cis-hetero middle-aged man who does not have primary care-giving responsibilities. Most of us do not fit neatly within this narrow category and experience the following issues more severely: access to education and career planning, unemployment, parental support, sexism, workplace harassment and discrimination. Many young women identified challenges gaining leadership opportunities and accessing the living wage.

## TAUTĀWHI (SUPPORT)

**Housing/homelessness:** Queer and transgender youth, particularly non-white, are over-represented in homeless statistics. It can be difficult for queer and transgender youth to find suitable housing as often they are overlooked as potential tenants. Lack of family support for queer and transgender youth is a contributing factor to homelessness.

**Legislation:** Young women need to feel supported at a structural level. This means implementing policies that reduce the barriers discussed above and ensuring youth have knowledge of their legal rights and access to welfare.

## TUARĀ (HELP)

**Effective support:** Celebrate successes and diverse role models. Offer accessible information and support. Support education and career transitions. Provide targeted support to young people experiencing intersectional oppression, including those who are Māori, disabled, migrants and refugees, queer and transgender. Maintain an intersectional approach and remember that many young people, especially tangata whenua, experience these issues simultaneously and disproportionately. Consult with internal groups and ask how you can help. Call out oppression when you see it.

So, do we really have it “easy these days”? ■

# Women's Support threatened by funding cut: Can you help?

**The Auckland Women's Centre needs your help. Our Women's Support service is under threat due to Government cutting \$30,000 in funding.**

Women's Support has been operating since 1975 and offers free violence-prevention support over the phone, by email and as a drop-in service, vital support to distressed women. (Look out for our Give A Little page in August and Women are Funny, a comedy fundraiser on Sunday 21 August. Please support us where you can.)

This funding cut is one of the Government's many to critical frontline services for women in need. Suicide prevention helpline, Lifeline, didn't receive a new contract. All Parents as First Teachers (PAFT) programmes that have helped tens of thousands of parents learn about their child's development have been cut, and a quarter of Strengthening Families contracts which assist families in coordinating access to services have been cancelled.

National advocacy groups such as Hui E, which connects different service providers and the National Council of Women (NCW) have also had their Government funding axed. NCW, established by suffragists in 1896, had all its Government funding removed.

In such a dire environment, we need Women's Support more than ever!

Our trained staff help over 3,000 women a year by offering:

- » crisis intervention to women with complex needs
- » support, information, advice and referral for emergency housing, women's refuge
- » rape counselling, child abuse reporting, abortion, parenting
- » links to AWC's low cost community education programme and counselling
- » referral to the right service based on particular needs



*Pictured: Ellie Lim*



*Pictured: Ellie Lim and Hinerangi Tarawa*

Every year we provide intensive crisis intervention to approximately ninety women with complex needs in a distressed state. Most of these clients are, or have been, in abusive relationships. Women feel safe and comfortable with our "by women, for women" service. Ellie Lim, who manages Women's Support and our community education programme, is a trained and experienced community worker and consistently provides a high quality service while ensuring our volunteers are well trained and supervised.

AWC is adept at making every funding dollar count. This is how we managed to keep our community education programme when the Government cut funding for night classes in 2008. However, we are now facing a crisis. It costs \$80,000 a year to provide the Women's Support service, so losing more than a third of the funds is a huge blow. If we don't find some more money we'll have to severely cut our hours.

If we end our financial year in June 2017 with a deficit, it will be the first time this has occurred since our revitalisation in 1992. **As a Women's Centre we are only as strong as the support you give us. We already receive considerable backing from many of you, for which we are grateful. Please consider making a donation to Women's Support if you can. It is easy to make a tax deductible donation via our [website](#). Thank you very much for your on-going support. ■**

## Auckland Women's Centre



## Contact & Services

### Contact us

09 376 3227 x 0  
[info@womensz.org.nz](mailto:info@womensz.org.nz)  
[www.awc.org.nz](http://www.awc.org.nz)

### Centre Hours

Monday to Friday  
9:00 am - 4:00 pm

### Library Hours

Monday to Friday  
9:00 am - 4:00 pm  
First Saturday  
of the month  
11:00 am - 1.30 pm

### Services

- + Women's Support: free support, info, advice and referral
- + Community Education
- + SKIP Single Mums Positive Parenting Project
- + Community Events
- + Counselling
- + LGBT support
- + Low Cost Massage
- + Self Defence Classes
- + Opportunities to talk and support feminism
- + Diversity Forums
- + Young Women's Youth Development Projects