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The qualitative methods utilised for this evaluation included student and staff interviews and focus groups, along with researcher observation. During the research, Rongo Atea went through a restructuring period that meant significant staff and programme changes, from which it is just starting to stabilise. For this reason the research has been on hold and is just now entering a period of workshops with staff which will be undertaken as the final stage of the evaluation. It is the intention that the evaluation findings to date will be utilised to workshop with staff in employing recommendations that will impact programme development and completion.

Implications – the evaluation of outcomes is mostly undertaken for government funding purposes and tends to focus on input/output rates with very little consideration of other factors that might constitute success. A qualitative evaluation of Rongo Atea offers the opportunity to explore interventions within an Indigenous model of treatment with the intention of bridging some of the gap between reporting/funding processes and actual programme intent and effect.

Findings – some themes to emerge from the research include the importance of programme related variables (such as programme content, relationship with support staff, sense of connection) on client retention and engagement, adolescent experience of 12 step programmes linked to relevance in their own lives and understanding of key principles, importance of staff training and alliance with programme principles and kawa, abstinence versus harm reduction – linking programme structure to individual client assessment related needs and goals, need for whanau involvement in treatment, and need for post treatment care and support.

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Separation from, or mixing with adult prisoners? Issues for young female prisoners in Aotearoa New Zealand Prisons

Commissioner for children and child advocate Cindy Kiro has called to separate girl prisoners from adult prisoners while they serve a prison sentence (The Press, July 2007). Such a call is based on dominant discourses from across the globe, which frame young women prisoners as vulnerable to corruption and victimisation from adult prisoners. Examples of those who promote such views include the UK based penal reform group Howard League, and United Nations who have developed a Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCROC). UNCROC states that children under 18 should not be mixed with adult prisoners unless it is in their best interests.

Focus groups and interviews about age-mixing in prisons with relevant iwi, and female prisoners aged between 14 and 19, reveal a complex picture. Exploring these texts using discourse analysis enables an understanding of the daily lived experiences of young female prisoners. A consideration of power relations (as theorised by Foucault), and the production of what is defined as credible knowledge, is relevant here. Dominant global perceptions of young and adult women prisoners were contested by some Indigenous groups and by prisoners themselves. A challenge for policy makers is how to consider definitions of ‘best interests’ in the New Zealand context. One way to honour the Treaty of Waitangi is to ensure definitions be made through a decolonising (Smith, 2005) lens, privileging Indigenous voices. A complicating factor however, is that there are distinct differences between iwi perspectives. Such challenges will be explored.