Access to justice: Reporting child sexual abuse in Australian Indigenous communities

by

Cate Bailey

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List of Publications

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All Indigenous people are entitled to live their lives in safety and full human dignity - without fear of intimidation, family violence or abuse. This is their cultural and their human right. Like all Australians, Indigenous peoples are also entitled to the full and equal protection of the law.

Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2006 p. 2)
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Abstract

Child sexual abuse has had a pervasive presence in many Indigenous minority communities globally. In Australia, there has been a significant focus on this issue at a governmental level, and in the media. Prior literature has focused on describing the problem, but has been hampered by insufficient qualitative information. Indigenous leaders and government taskforces have called for better analysis, information and resources, to address child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities. It is in this context that the current thesis is presented. The aim of the thesis was to explore issues of child sexual abuse in Australian Indigenous communities in relation to the criminal justice system.

This thesis contains five studies that are presented in two phases. The first three studies, contained in Phase one, utilised detailed case data from the Police Information Management Systems of two jurisdictions. Study 1 investigated tracking of cases through the criminal justice system, comparing how Indigenous cases proceeded compared to non-Indigenous cases. This study found that Indigenous cases were less likely to proceed through the criminal justice system than non-Indigenous cases. There were two stages where Indigenous cases were less likely to proceed. The first stage was gaining child evidence. Indigenous children were significantly less likely to have disclosed in a forensic interview than non-Indigenous children. The second stage was having the case proceeded by prosecutors. Indigenous children were significantly less likely to have their cases proceeded by prosecutors than non-Indigenous children. There were no significant differences in attrition between groups
at the case charged, case proceeded to trial or conviction stages. These findings were consistent across both jurisdictions.

The second study aimed to investigate which factors may influence children to disclose to police in a forensic interview. Case characteristics were used to model predictors of forensic disclosure. Community related variables, such as whether the child had disclosed previously to a family or community member, and whether a family or community member was prepared to make a formal statement to police, were found to significantly predict forensic disclosure for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. This effect, though, was more pronounced for Indigenous children.

The focus of Study 3 was to investigate reporting rates and criminal justice responses to child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in the two jurisdictions. Reporting rates, per population, were found to be higher for Indigenous than non-Indigenous groups, and there were differences in reporting rates between the two jurisdictions for the Indigenous samples. Analyses of case tracking and case characteristics suggested that the differences between reporting rates for the two Indigenous samples were due to higher under-reporting in the second jurisdiction.

Phase two of the thesis contained two studies that evaluated an initiative aimed at addressing child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities. This initiative had a focus on proactive community engagement, and was a collaboration between the Western Australian Police and the Department of Child Protection. A team of detectives and child interviewers visited remote Indigenous communities at regular intervals, with the aim of increasing reporting of, investigating and preventing, child sexual abuse. Study 1 found that the number of reports increased in intervention areas
during the intervention time-period, but not in the non-intervention areas. This suggested that the first aim of the initiative, to increase reporting of child sexual abuse, had been successfully achieved. Response to child sexual abuse was measured by the arrest per report rate. This rate was higher in the intervention areas compared to non-intervention areas, and continued to improve in the post intervention period.

The second study in Phase two evaluated Indigenous stakeholders’ responses to the initiative. This study found that Indigenous stakeholders strongly endorsed the initiative. Family members of children who had been sexually abused, who had first-hand experience of the initiative, described highly positive experiences and outcomes. Service providers who lived in the communities expressed the view that the level of service provided by the initiative was far above what had previously been experienced. Strong features of the initiative were described by participants as engagement, trust, warm relationships and fair outcomes.

The findings of this thesis made several unique contributions to research in this area. Firstly, patterns of progression of Indigenous child sexual abuse cases through the criminal justice system have been documented for the first time. Secondly, the importance of community related variables in the likelihood of cases staying in the criminal justice system has been empirically described. This information is vital for targeting scarce resources to effectively influence outcomes for children who have been sexual abused. Importantly, studies in the second phase of this thesis were able to directly assess the practical implications of the outcomes of Phase one. This was achieved by evaluating an initiative that aimed to address child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities using a targeted, proactive, community engagement response. The initiative was found to be highly successful on a range of
outcome measures. The studies in this thesis present evidence-based guidance for
government and policy makers in introducing best practice for addressing child sexual
abuse in remote Indigenous communities.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse of children is a global problem that has no gender, age or racial boundaries. It has affected millions of children around the world (World Health Organisation, 1999). One of the main predictors of child sexual abuse is family dysfunction, a term that encompasses problems of alcohol and drug abuse, low socio-economic level, and issues with health, housing and employment (Bromfield & Holzer, 2008). Unfortunately, these factors have been endemic in many Indigenous communities, and are reflected in the high level of child sexual abuse found in them (Wild & Anderson, 2007).

Globally, rates of sexual abuse of Indigenous children have been estimated to be around two to eight times that of non-Indigenous children. Concern about high levels of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities has prompted numerous government inquiries in countries with minority Indigenous communities, such as Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Berlyn, Bromfield, & Lamont, 2011; Blackstock, Trocmé, & Bennett, 2004; Collin-Vezina, Dion, & Trocme, 2009; Coorey, 2001; Crime and Misconduct Commission, 2004; Daly & Bouhours, 2010; Funston, 2013; Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002; Guthridge, Ryan & Bromfield, 2012; Mulligan, 2008; Stanley, Tomison, & Pocock, 2003; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011; Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004; Wild & Anderson, 2007). Whilst this concern has been extensively documented, few improvements have been apparent (Adelson, 2005; Australian Government
Department of Social Services, 2012; Guthridge et al., 2012). Interventions have often not been evaluated, and in Australia, when evaluation has taken place, attempts to intervene have generally been determined to be unsuccessful (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2012; Fawcett & Hanlon, 2009; Henry, Congdon, Frigo, Buczynski, & Skidmore, 2013; Hunter, 2008).

Accurately determining prevalence of child sexual abuse has been difficult due to limited data, with most available information coming from crime statistics or child protection reports (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2010). Child sexual abuse has mainly been comprised of victimisation that has never been reported or disclosed to police, and is thus a ‘dark number’ that can only be guessed at (sometimes referred to as the dark figure of crime) (Lievore, 2003; Willis, 2011). In five studies where the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the general community has been most comprehensively measured, prevalence rates for girls were 4.0-12.0% for penetrative abuse and 13.9-36.0% for non-penetrative abuse, and for boys, 1.4-8.0% for penetrative abuse and 5.7-16.0% for non-penetrative abuse (Price-Robertson, Bromfield, Vassallo, & Scott, 2013). Estimates of the prevalence of child sexual abuse in minority Indigenous communities have not been available, but have been generally considered to be far higher than in the general community (Blackstock et al., 2004; Calma, 2006; Gordon et al., 2002; Guthridge, Ryan, Condon, et al., 2012; Trocmé et al., 2004; University of Auckland, 2008). Indigenous cases have been found to involve both girls and boys, urban and remote communities, and to be committed by non-Indigenous and Indigenous males of all ages (Wild & Anderson, 2007).
The prevalence of child sexual abuse is accompanied by the issue of the extremely low reporting rates found in many Indigenous communities (Gordon et al., 2002; Stanley, 2003; Wild & Anderson, 2007). In some Indigenous communities with high risk factors for child sexual abuse (such as high crime, pornography abuse, high numbers of under-aged pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases in children), low or non-existent reporting of child sexual abuse has been apparent (Mace & Powell, 2012). The term report is used here to mean a report of abuse made by a child, family member or professional to police or social workers.

It is difficult to estimate under-reporting of child sexual abuse, as incidents that are not reported to authorities do not make it into official statistics. In a review of a large sample of studies in the general community, the reporting rate for child sexual abuse was described as “somewhat lower” than the 14% estimated in the adult population (Daly & Bouhours, 2010, p 572). Whilst there were no available estimates of reporting rates for Indigenous children, the significant mismatch between high risk factors and low numbers of reports suggests that under-reporting in Indigenous communities was more problematic than in the general community (Bromfield & Holzer, 2008; Stanley et al., 2003). The New South Wales Ombudsman described the number of reported cases of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities as “only the ‘tip of the iceberg’” (2012, p iv).

Even when reported, cases of child sexual abuse in the general community have higher attrition and lower conviction rates than other indictable offences (Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2004). The likelihood of a reported case of sexual abuse proceeding to conviction was found in an international study to be an average of 12.5%, with only around 6.5% being convicted of the original offence.
(Daly & Bouhours, 2010). Similar statistics were found in individual studies in Australia for child sexual offences, with estimates of between 7.5% of cases found guilty (Fitzgerald, 2006) and 10.6% of cases receiving some sort of sanction, such as a caution, family conference or court penalty (Wundersitz, 2003). A survey that retrospectively asked adults whether they were abused as children estimated that only around 10% of cases were reported to police (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996).

Attrition statistics for Indigenous cases of child sexual abuse have not been available; however, these cases may face a further range of barriers as they proceed through the criminal justice system compared to cases from the general community (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Wild & Anderson, 2007). Factors such as poor relationships with authorities, fear of community backlash, retaliation from family and community members, and other socio-emotional factors, may all contribute to lowering the chances of an Indigenous case proceeding to a successful prosecution.

The central aim of this thesis was to better understand outcomes of cases of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities within the criminal justice system. In the current thesis, this central aim provoked a range of questions. What access do Indigenous child who have been sexually abused have to justice? Are there inequalities for Indigenous children in how cases of sexual abuse progress through the criminal justice system? What could be determined about reporting and under-reporting in these communities? How could the criminal justice system best respond to addressing child sexual abuse in these communities? In addressing these questions, the thesis intended to provide accurate and timely information to inform police practice and policy formation.
Overview of studies

This thesis has been constructed in two phases. Phase one investigated patterns in the interaction of cases of sexual abuse of Indigenous children with the criminal justice system. Phase two evaluated a community engagement initiative that aimed to address child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities.

Phase one

The first phase of the thesis contained three studies. Data used in Phase one were from two separate jurisdictions. The aim of using two jurisdictions was to determine the stability of results across areas with different demographics, as Indigenous populations are known to be heterogeneous (Dillon & Westbury, 2007). The two jurisdictions had 3-4%, and approximately 30%, of the population being Indigenous, respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The first jurisdiction was approximately ten times the size of the population of the second (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Study 1 aimed to determine whether there were differences in progression rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases of child sexual abuse, as they proceeded through the criminal justice system. As has been documented in the previous section, the chance of a reported case of child sexual abuse in the general community proceeding to conviction has generally been low, and cases may leave the criminal justice system at a number of progression stages between report and conviction (Fitzgerald, 2006; Wundersitz, 2003). What was not known was whether Indigenous cases had similar or different patterns of case progression to non-Indigenous cases. What was not known was whether Indigenous cases had similar or
different patterns of case progression to non-Indigenous cases. In this study, five case progression points were investigated: whether the child disclosed in a forensic interview, whether the case was charged, whether the case was proceeded by public prosecutors, whether the case went to trial, and whether the case resulted in a conviction (these progression points are described in detail in Chapter 2). Compared to previous studies, this level of detail regarding the number of progression points was high, with most similar studies only able to provide limited information on where cases leave the criminal justice system (Daly & Bouhours, 2010).

The aim of the second study was to determine whether differences found in progression stages between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases of child sexual abuse in the first study could be further understood by investigating case characteristics. The datasets from the police information management systems contained information on child and offender demographics, and on case characteristics such as whether the child had made a prior disclosure, whether there were corroborating witnesses, and the relationship between the offender and the child. In Study 2, this information was used to construct models to determine which case characteristics may predict differences found in Study 1. Information from these models could help to produce targeted programs that would be more effective in addressing child sexual abuse in these communities.

As has been noted in the section above, only a small proportion of child sexual abuse cases are ever reported to police (Finkelhor, 1994; Hunter, 2008; London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005). The aim of Study 3 was to investigate whether there were differences in reporting rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases of child sexual abuse, and across jurisdictions. Numbers of reports
per 1000 of the population were calculated for Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases by jurisdiction. Case progression and case characteristics were then investigated to determine whether these variables could help to explain differences found in reporting rates. In this manner, a clearer understanding of reporting, and possible indications of the effect of under-reporting, might be investigated from the available data.

In summary, Phase one of this thesis sought to understand patterns of reporting and case progression for Indigenous cases of child sexual abuse, compared to non-Indigenous cases. Differences in progression of cases, which variables predicted these differences, and reporting rates, were investigated.

**Phase two**

Phase two evaluated a joint police and child welfare initiative that aimed to address child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities. Program evaluation may be essential in order to ensure that evidence gained from initiatives can be embedded in policy and the implementation of future programs (Productivity Commission, 2012). An evaluation is, in essence, the application of scientific methods to measure program design, implementation and outcomes, and to make judgements on the worth of the program (Parker & Lamont, 2010). When working with Indigenous communities, cultural competency and building capacity to effectively evaluate programs have been flagged as important and necessary extra steps (Caldwell et al., 2005).

The initiative aimed to address child sexual abuse with a child protection strategy that utilised proactive, community engagement principles. The mobile, multi-
disciplinary specialist child abuse team was comprised of both detectives and social workers. The intervention was based on three core principles. The first core principal was that preventing and responding to child sexual abuse must be a shared responsibility. The second core principal was that it must address the underlying causes and contextual issues. The final core principal was that the intervention must enhance children’s safety and wellbeing by empowering families and communities. A detailed overview of the rationale for the intervention, core principals, and stages of implementation are found in Chapter 6, followed by two evaluations, a quantitative study followed by a qualitative study.

The initiative studied in these evaluations took place in remote Western Australian Indigenous communities. Western Australia is the largest Australian state, encompassing around 2.6 million square kilometres, with a population of around 2.2 million people in 2011 (at the time of data collection for these studies). Only one quarter of the state’s population lives outside the metropolitan area of the capital city, and much of the state is arid or semi-arid.

The first study in Phase two (Study 4) investigated whether the intervention increased reporting rates and supported better outcomes for children. In many of the towns and communities where the intervention was implemented, risk factors for child sexual abuse were high, however reporting was low or negligible. Increasing reporting rates was therefore one of the primary aims of the intervention. The overall aim of this study was to test whether the new model of intervention was associated with actual increases in reports and arrests in the areas where the initiative was conducted. In order to test whether reports increased in intervention areas, statewide data on all reports and arrests was obtained for three eighteen-month periods: before,
during and after the intervention. Three outcome variables were evaluated: number of reports, number of arrests, and the arrest per report rate. These variables were compared across time periods, and between intervention and non-intervention areas, using a mixed, between-within model.

The first specific aim of Study 4 was to determine whether reports of child sexual abuse had increased over time in intervention areas compared to regions without the intervention. Secondly, the study aimed to investigate any corresponding increases in arrests in intervention areas compared to non-intervention areas. For the intervention to be deemed successful in the longer term, the arrest rate (rate of arrest per incident report) would need to increase during the initiative, and be maintained or increased further following the initiative. Changes in arrest rates would not be apparent in the regions that did not participate in the operation. The final aim of this study was, therefore, to investigate the arrest per report rate over the longer term.

The second evaluation in Phase two (Study 5) was a qualitative study of Indigenous stakeholders’ evaluation of the initiative. The overall aim of this study was to understand the experiences of the initiative from the perspective of Indigenous stakeholders. Nine interviews with Indigenous stakeholders were analysed. These stakeholders were either family members of children who had been sexually abused and who had direct experience with the initiative, or Indigenous service providers living within the communities.

Listening to the voices of recipients of an intervention program is critical in an evaluation process, and is particularly important when recipients have historically been from marginalised groups, such as the Indigenous peoples of Australia (Briggs & Sharp, 2004; Brown & Brown, 2007; Carnes, 2011; Louis, 2007; Maddison, 2012;
Mertens, 1999). Listening is also critical when evaluating an intervention that intends to tackle a large power differential, such as is apparent in child sexual abuse. Study 5 was an important next step in the evaluation of the initiative, and in terms of the overall thesis, in that it gave a voice to the people that interventions and policy decisions affect.

**Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is presented according to the university’s requirements for thesis by publication. All empirical studies are presented as published, or as submitted for publication. Although some repetition was unavoidable, due to the thesis by publication format, the papers form a varied, but strongly linked, discussion of the issue of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities.

The structure of the thesis is represented in Figure 1.1. Chapter two presents an overview of the criminal justice system response to cases of child sexual abuse in Australia. Each stage of the process is outlined, and incorporates a discussion of some of the increased challenges that Indigenous children face when interacting with the criminal justice system. Chapter three discusses theoretical epistemologies of Indigenous Research, and the role of the non-Indigenous researcher within this context. Chapters four and five (Studies 1, 2 and 3) form the first phase of the thesis, investigating differences in Indigenous versus non-Indigenous cases of child sexual abuse in the criminal justice system. Chapters six to eight (Studies 4 and 5) form the second phase of the thesis. Chapter six presents an overview of a community engagement initiative, known as Operation RESET, which aimed to address child
**Figure 1.1 Summary of chapters in the thesis**
sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities. Chapters seven and eight present two empirical studies evaluating this initiative. Chapter nine contains a general discussion and conclusion to the thesis.

The studies presented in this thesis make a unique contribution to investigating child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in two main ways. Firstly, data available to analyse Indigenous cases in the criminal justice system have been requested as a high priority by Indigenous leaders and government (Australian Legal Reform Commission, 2010; Calma, 2006; Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, 2008; New South Wales Ombudsman, 2012). Data presented in this thesis has enabled an in-depth investigation of reporting, under-reporting and attrition of child sexual abuse cases as they proceed through the criminal justice system, and offered new insights in this field. Secondly, this thesis investigated an initiative to address child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities. Outcomes from the summation of the two phases of this thesis are intended to inform evidence-based policy guidelines, with the aim of improving outcomes within the criminal justice system for Indigenous children who have been sexually abused.
CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF THE RESPONSE TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CASES IN AUSTRALIAN JURISDICTIONS

This chapter presents an overview of the Australian response to cases of child sexual abuse. At each stage of the criminal justice process, commentary is presented on additional complexities that may be experienced by Indigenous children and their families.

A definition of child sexual abuse

Sexual abuse of children refers to: any sexual activity between an adult and a child who is below the age of consent (as defined in each particular jurisdiction); sexual activity that is non-consensual between young people; or any sexual activity between a child below the age of 18 years old and a person in a position of authority or power, such as a parent or teacher. “Sexual activity includes fondling genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling of breasts, voyeurism, exhibitionism and exposing or involving the child in pornography” (Price-Robertson et al., 2013).

Reporting and mandated reporting

Reports of alleged child sexual abuse may come from a range of different sources. These include the children themselves, relatives or friends, or child protection workers. Generally, reports are made to the offices of the police or the child protection department of the jurisdiction, or they may be submitted
anonymously through a website set up to allow citizens to report crime. Of cases that are reported, many are due to mandatory reporting rules.

The term *mandatory reporting* describes the legislative obligation for persons in specific occupations to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to authorities (Mathews & Scott, 2016). Mandatory reporting is in effect in all Australian jurisdictions, however the laws differ between them. The main differences are regarding who is mandated to report, and what types of abuse are required to be reported. Generally, the legislation requires that the person make a mandatory report if they suspect or have the belief, based on reasonable grounds, that the child has been or will be neglected or abused, sexually or physically.

Persons required to make a mandated report vary by jurisdiction. In Queensland, only persons in a limited number of occupations are bound by mandatory reporting. Western Australia has a more wide-ranging list, and the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria have more extensive lists again. In the Northern Territory (and Victoria for sexual abuse) every adult is mandated to make a report. Occupations that are most frequently required to make reports are those who deal with children as part of their work, such as teachers, health professionals and police. Differences in statutory responsibilities for child protection between jurisdictions can result in children being missed, which has led to the development of a National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020 (Council of Australian Governments, 2009).

In Indigenous communities, implementing mandatory reporting may be more difficult. Service providers in some remote communities in the Northern Territory were found to be unaware of mandatory reporting requirements, and were also
concerned that if they reported sexual abuse in their community, they may be identified in the community as being the source of the report (Wild & Anderson, 2007). Issues were also identified in regards to language. In some communities, the concept of mandatory reporting was less well understood due to low levels of English, and lack of understanding of some of the terms that were used. Wild and Anderson recommended more education and training on mandatory reporting in many communities.

Rates of sexually transmitted infections in remote Indigenous communities have been found to be higher than in urban or non-Indigenous communities (Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, 2008). Guidelines have been set up in some jurisdictions to address mandatory reporting requirements specifically in relation to these cases. In the Northern Territory, any evidence of a child under 14 having sexual activity must be notified to a centralised agency. For children 14 years and older, the health professional is required to use their professional judgement when deciding to make a notification.

The New South Wales Ombudsman noted that there was a need to collect and analyse data about the mandatory reporting of sexual abuse of Indigenous children (New South Wales Ombudsman, 2012). The report specifically recommended the examination of which agencies and occupations were making mandatory reports in specified locations.
Response to reporting

Following a report of suspected abuse, an initial assessment is made, and the report is then referred to the appropriate government agency. Each jurisdiction has a multi-disciplinary response to the investigation of child abuse, including specialised policing units, departments of child protection, and other relevant organisations such as health and education. This integrated response attempts to provide safety for the child as the first priority, whilst also allowing for the investigation, including collection of evidence, to take place (State of Victoria, 2012). An initial interview is made with the child if they have not made a clear verbal disclosure to any person (known as a prior or previous disclosure). If the child discloses in this interview, the interview is immediately terminated so that a video recorded forensic interview can be conducted with the child, to ensure that the child’s evidence is accurately documented, and admissible in court.

Giving evidence in criminal proceedings can be traumatising for children, and cross-examination is considered to be the most traumatising aspect, particularly in sexual offence proceedings (Richards, 2009). Understanding legal language and answering questions during cross-examination is difficult, and particularly so for younger children. Presenting forensic interviews that have been previously recorded in court is one way that this exposure can be reduced. All Australian jurisdictions, therefore, conduct video recorded investigative interviews, so that these can be presented as evidence-in-chief during criminal proceedings. Every attempt is also made to keep the number of interviews, and the number of interviewers, to a minimum (Government of South Australia, 2016). Where further information is
required, or if new evidence is brought forth, more interviews with the child may be required.

The prior recording of the interview can also increase the quality of the child’s evidence by capturing this evidence whilst it is still fresh, and by lowering the likelihood of the child’s memory being contaminated. The child’s first recorded account of the suspected abuse may be the most detailed, clear, and complete description. If the child subsequently cannot, or refuses to, give evidence, and if no physical or other corroborating evidence is available, the recording of this interview may be the only evidence available against the suspected offender (Corns, 2001).

Interviews are usually conducted in interview rooms where cameras and microphones have been unobtrusively placed. The visual recording of the forensic interview provides the jury with an accurate representation of how the child presented during the interview. Effective investigative interviewing is essential to elicit the best evidence, and relies on effective training of interviewers (Powell, 2005).

As has been noted above, presenting testimony can be highly traumatic for children generally, but Indigenous children may face additional difficulties in giving evidence. Often, English is not their first language or they have under-developed English skills, they may have poor school attendance, and may also be more likely to be affected by abuse and neglect within their own family systems than non-Indigenous children. These factors make Indigenous children particularly vulnerable as witnesses in sexual abuse trials, which require reliable oral evidence (Cossins, 2006).
Indigenous children may also have fears of disclosing in an interview, due to possible repercussions from family and community (Stanley et al., 2003). The abuse of children in Indigenous communities is embedded in the high rates of violence experienced in these communities. This violence has been particularly focussed against women and children (Keel, 2004; Sutton, 2011). Threats from the offender and the offender’s family may jeopardise how willing a child and the child’s family may be to report and disclose abuse.

Indigenous children who have been sexually abused may have added feelings of shame and embarrassment that are influenced by their cultural background, and this can further affect their willingness to participate in the criminal justice system. Shame can have a different connotation in Indigenous culture, and Indigenous peoples have reported shame in situations where non-Indigenous people would not describe being ashamed (Sharifian, 2005). A study that examined investigative interviewing of Indigenous children found that Indigenous children who verbally expressed shame in forensic interviews had been delivered significantly more interviewer prompts before they made a disclosure of sexual abuse, than children who did not verbally express shame (Hamilton, Brubacher, & Powell, 2016).

A further impediment for Indigenous children when presenting evidence, may be the differences in communication styles of Indigenous people compared to non-Indigenous Australians, such as use of silence, non-verbal cues and a tendency to agree out of politeness with what is suggested (Eades, 1982; 2013). Suggestive questions from interviewers can increase the likelihood of contradictory evidence (Lamb & Fauchier, 2001). Indigenous defendants and witnesses may be silenced in
the justice system by service providers who are ignorant of Indigenous cultural values and practices (Eades, 2000).

**Investigation of Child Sexual Abuse Cases**

In most jurisdictions, the child is interviewed by one interviewer, whilst a second interviewer observes from a hidden room. If the investigative officer is not the interviewer, then they may also observe the interview from outside. During breaks in the interview, the observing officers will provide feedback to the lead interviewer regarding what further information may be needed. Following the conclusion of the interview, the officer investigating the case will gather the available information into a brief of evidence. This may include medical or physical evidence, witness statements, DNA results and photos. If it is determined that a criminal law may have been violated, the suspect will be apprehended and interviewed. Charges will be presented to the suspect, with specific details on the case. The suspect is then given the opportunity to dispute this by supplying an alibi.

The investigator uses all the available evidence to decide whether to refer the case for prosecution. Decisions by police to prosecute the suspect will depend on whether the brief constitutes prima facie evidence that supports the charges, and if legal requirements have been met (Brereton & Cole, 1988). Evidence obtained in the interview needs to be sufficiently detailed in order to enable this decision to be made (Government of South Australia, 2016). If the case goes ahead, the Magistrates Court will receive the evidence, and commit the defendant to trial at an appropriate court.
One of the particular issues for Indigenous cases at this stage may be obtaining corroborating witnesses. The tenuous relationship of law enforcement officers and human service agencies with Indigenous communities has been eroded over generations, and has been strongly affected by the removal of children from their communities. Having their children taken away is a real fear for many Indigenous peoples internationally, the reality of which is reflected in the high numbers of Indigenous children in out of home care in Canada (Trocmé et al., 2004) and Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011; Berlyn et al., 2011; Commissioner for children and young people, 2015; Wild & Anderson, 2007). If corroborating the abuse may cause children to be removed from their homes and communities, many family and community members may refuse to give evidence to support the case, thus making the case more difficult to prosecute.

Prosecution of Child Sexual Abuse Cases

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions assumes responsibility for the case once it has been committed to trial. This office is an independent authority that is responsible for prosecuting serious offences that have been committed against state criminal law. A prosecutor is assigned to each case that has been committed to trial, and will decide whether to prosecute based on three factors: evidential strength, prospects for conviction and whether the case is in the public interest (Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, 2008). If the prosecutor decides to continue the case, an indictment will be filed, and a trial date set. The defendant is able to plead guilty at any point before or during the trial.
Australia uses an adversarial trial system, where advocates for the prosecution and defence present their evidence in turn. A judge or jury decide on the outcome of the case. The trial begins with opening addresses from the prosecution and defence. In cases of child sexual abuse, the prosecutor may then choose to play one or all of the forensic interviews as the child’s evidence in chief. The child will usually be required to be available for cross-examination at the trial; however, in some jurisdictions, cross-examination has taken place previously, and the recording is played to the judge or jurors at the trial (Judicial Commission of New South Wales, 2014). If cross-examination of the child takes place during the trial, the child will give evidence remotely via video link, to minimise exposure of the child to the court and to the defendant. Any further evidence in the trial, including the appearance of witnesses, is presented by the opposing parties, and the evidence is tested through examination. The trial concludes with a closing address from each side.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that going to trial may be more challenging for Indigenous families. Indigenous children may be more likely to withdraw from a court case than non-Indigenous children because of the pressure from some communities not to proceed with child sexual abuse cases. Further, community pressures may mean that corroborating witnesses, who had previously made a statement, may be less likely to show up for a court appearance. Timeliness of court cases may be another issue for many Indigenous families. When cases take 12-18 months to get to court (as documented in: Government of Western Australia, 2013), families have often dealt with the issue and do not want to revisit it. Finally, prosecutors may find these cases more difficult due to communication issues with
Indigenous children, issues with distance or remoteness, and poverty, and may therefore be more hesitant to proceed with them.

Summary

This section has outlined the stages involved in proceeding a case of child sexual abuse through the criminal justice system, and some of the additional complexities that may be experienced by Indigenous complainants. These complexities are characterised by difficulties with language, family and community tensions, and the interface between Indigenous peoples and authorities. The next chapter will discuss the context for research on Indigenous peoples.
CHAPTER THREE: OVERVIEW OF ‘INDIGENOUS RESEARCH’

Indigenous minority peoples, globally, have been some of the most researched and investigated populations (Rigney, 1997; Smith, 2012). Unfortunately, this research and concern has not led to significant improvements for Indigenous peoples, and Smith described research as “probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (2012, p. 1). Academic discourse on Indigenous issues has been criticised as having a Westernised perspective, and presenting research on Indigenous peoples through a Westernised ‘lens’ (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2013). These criticisms have informed an epistemology known as Indigenous Research.

This chapter aims to give an overview of Indigenous Research, and to contextualise the thesis within this theoretical framework. It further aims to discuss the place of the non-Indigenous researcher within this framework and to place the author of the thesis within this context.

Indigenous Research: Framework and Methodologies

Indigenous minority peoples have been extensively studied for generations. Knowledge about them has been collected, categorized, controlled and represented through the lens of Western academia. The abundance of research on Indigenous topics has engendered distrust, hostility and resistance from many Indigenous people, as it has been done without their consent, consultation or participation (Martin, 2003). In the main, this research has been constructed without Indigenous input, in a non-Indigenous language, for a non-Indigenous audience (Foley, 2003). Tuck
described Indigenous peoples as being “over-researched, yet, ironically, made invisible” (2009, p. 412). Indigenous peoples have often been presented as either victims or perpetrators, thus framing these communities as sites of disinvestment and dispossession.

Despite the plethora of research on Indigenous peoples, there has been little gain for Indigenous peoples as a whole, nor for the communities that have been studied (Bainbridge, Tsey, et al., 2015; Kovach, 2005; Rigney, 1997; Smith, 2012). Indigenous peoples have been seen as a problem that needs to be solved, and it is only through a genuine dialogue with Indigenous voices and perspectives that this difficult terrain can be navigated (Maddison, 2012). Indigenous researchers have stated that there has been a need to take control of research on Indigenous peoples, so that it may be relevant, useful and based on the actual, rather than assumed, needs of Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2005). New ways were required to better represent the interests of Indigenous peoples, and to present alternative ways of approaching research processes (Porsanger, 2004).

‘Indigenous Research’ has been described as being part of the emancipatory methodologies that include epistemologies in feminism, critical hermeneutics, postmodern and critical theory. These theories contend that people who live their lives in marginal places in society experience injustice and habitually have their voices silenced. This silencing has been particularly pervasive in academic environments, where what counts as knowledge has been rigidly defined (Kovach, 2005). Emancipatory epistemologies have been constructed such that the research participant may be seen and heard.
Effectively defining Indigenous Research has been an ongoing process, and the subject of debate amongst Indigenous researchers. The influential work of Lester Irabinna Rigney in 1997 and Linda Tuhiwai Smith in 1999 set the groundwork for study in this arena, inciting much discussion and initiating a significant body of writing on this subject.

Rigney’s early work suggested that Indigenous Research could be defined by three fundamental principles, all of which were inter-related: “resistance as the emancipatory imperative; political integrity; and privileging Indigenous voices” (Rigney, 1997, p. 636). Indigenous, or ‘Indigenist’ research, was defined here as research by Indigenous Australians for Indigenous Australians, with the goals of serving and informing “the liberation struggle to be free of oppression and to gain power” (p 637). Whilst not arguing for a rejection of the dominant forms of ontology, epistemology and axiology, Rigney called for a de-racialisation and de-colonisation of these issues in order to gain cultural freedom for Indigenous peoples.

The centrality of the position of resistance advocated by Rigney had been examined by Martin (2003), who did not place herself in a position of resistance against the research frameworks and ideologies from the western academic framework. She described her active use of her Aboriginal heritage as her strength, and she located her research beside and amongst western worldviews. The importance of privileging Indigenous voices, however, was acknowledged by both researchers, and Martin focussed also on the inclusion of Indigenous worldviews, social processes and the social, historical and political contexts that shaped the lives of Indigenous peoples.
Discussion of methodologies has taken a central place in defining Indigenous Research. In ‘Decolonizing Methodologies’, Smith (2012) was concerned with the context in which research questions were theorised (conceptualised) and designed, rather than the actual techniques of selecting particular types of methodologies (see also Dei, 2000). Smith focused on the need to develop Indigenous methodologies, and to move from research being perceived through the lens of the Western academy, to the lens of the Indigenous researcher.

Focussing on experience as a legitimate way of knowing was a methodology that has gained traction within Indigenous Research (Kovach, 2005). Methods such as storytelling have been seen as legitimate ways of knowledge sharing, and the relationship between the researcher and participants becomes a natural part of the research methodology. The term commonly used for turning information into knowledge is ‘yarning’, an Indigenous cultural form of conversation (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010). Yarning has been used for information gathering, and to establish relationships with Indigenous participants. Inherent in yarning is the intention of creating a power balance between the researcher and the researched. Kovach stated that it was preferable that an Indigenous epistemology be used in Indigenous research, as the participants were likely to present their experiences within this perspective.

Methodologies used in Indigenous Research were not necessarily meant to replace or compete with the paradigm of Western research, but were intended to challenge and contribute to it (Porsanger, 2004). The aim of these methodologies was to carry out respectful, ethical research for the benefit of Indigenous peoples, and to
address the needs of Indigenous peoples, rather than treating them as objects of investigation.

To address issues of research on Indigenous peoples, and to assert the inherent rights of Indigenous people to full and fair participation in processes that impinge on them, a set of research guidelines was created to influence best practice research in an Indigenous context. The ‘Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies’ was first published in 2002 and has been updated twice, most recently in 2012. The document contains fourteen principals that have been grouped into the following six broad categories: rights, respect and recognition; negotiation, consultation, agreement and mutual understanding; participation, collaboration and partnership; benefits, outcomes and giving back; managing research: use, storage and access; and reporting and compliance. The guidelines state that at every stage, research with and about Indigenous peoples must be based on meaningful engagement and the mutual benefit of the researcher and Indigenous peoples (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012).

‘Damaged-centred’ research

There has been a deep perplexity around describing the suffering and damage of Indigenous peoples. Recounting the disadvantage, pain and humiliation that Indigenous peoples have experienced may be portrayed as a commodification of their suffering. Concurrent to this is the necessity to name the crimes, in order that they may be contested (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Despite this complexity, Tuck and Yang stated that research was a significant place of legitimate enquiry, where claims could be tested, and investigations could take place. What is included in research may be as
important as what is refused, and this thesis has attempted to navigate this space.

Children making allegations of sexual abuse have been referred to in the current study as children, rather than victims, to emphasise their humanity.

One of the questions that Tuck and Yang asked was can the non-Indigenous researcher listen? In critical theory and post-colonialism, the term subaltern refers to groups that are socially, politically and geographically outside the dominant power structures of the culture. The authors posed the following questions, does the subaltern speak, can they be heard and do they act, and can the ‘coloniser/settler’ listen? (Tuck & Yang, 2014). These questions are important in considering how best to do research on Indigenous topics, and importantly, to do no harm.

The documentation of the oppression and pain of Indigenous communities has made up a large proportion of research on Indigenous peoples. Tuck and Yang not only asked whether the subaltern can speak, but whether the subaltern is only invited to speak in the context of pain and oppression. The authors described this type of research as ‘damage-centred’, as researchers operate within an understanding that harm must be documented so that reparations can be made (Tuck, 2009). This may be disempowering for Indigenous communities, relying on them being seen as defective, disenfranchised places that need to be repaired.

In the current thesis, positive actions being taken by communities have been highlighted on a number of levels. Whilst it was important that the background experienced by Indigenous peoples was accurately portrayed, every attempt was made to present the material in positive ways that may help the issues move forward, rather than being locked in a damage-centred perspective. This aim was made easier by the positive outcomes apparent in the second phase of the thesis.
Non-Indigenous researchers on Indigenous topics

I first want to start with an apology. You only have me presenting this paper - a white person talking about Indigenous issues. Although white Australians often claim to know and represent Indigenous Australians, they have often failed to understand the Indigenous position. Although this has usually, although not always, been with good intentions, it has often caused much trauma and distress - much still unresolved and still being created today (Stanley, 2003, p17).

Being a non-Indigenous researcher writing on an Indigenous topic can be an awkward position, as Stanley has described so eloquently in the above quotation. Smith (2012) stated that there have been some shifts by non-Indigenous researchers in how they position their research in relation to the people whom the research is intended to aid. She encouraged non-Indigenous researchers to clarify their research aims, and to carefully consider effective and ethical means of conducting research with Indigenous peoples.

In order to best ensure that the studies contained in this thesis were conducted with consideration of the sensitivities of the topic, support was enlisted from Deakin University’s Institute of Koorie Education. In a private meeting, the deputy director, Professor Brian Martin, described how Indigenous researchers were trying to completely change how research on Indigenous peoples was done, using written guidelines developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2012). He stressed the importance of three areas in particular:
building relationships, giving back, and working with Indigenous researchers, each of which will now be addressed.

**Building relationships.** A collaborative approach between Indigenous community members and researchers has been noted as an important feature of Indigenous Research. This collaborative approach was built into the planning and implementation stages of the initiative evaluated in Phase two of this thesis. In the building phases of the initiative, the research team visited local communities and consulted extensively with community members. Over sixty letters of support were obtained from stakeholders, including Indigenous leaders and community members. During the evaluation phase, all interviews with Indigenous stakeholders were conducted by Indigenous interviewers, to ensure that Indigenous interviewees were approached by an appropriate person. Matters of consent to being part of the research project were clearly stated.

**Giving back.** Wherever possible, information has been disseminated back to Indigenous stakeholders. As this information has been written in academic language for publication in research journals, it has been rewritten for dissemination in the form of media releases such that the information may be more easily accessible (see Appendix B). It is strongly hoped that the outcomes of this thesis will support the roll-out of future versions of the initiative evaluated in Phase two of this thesis, and thereby give back to Indigenous families in terms of ongoing support by police and the processes of the criminal justice system.
Collaborating with Indigenous Researchers. Collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers may be of significant benefit to both parties. Working together can help the non-Indigenous researcher to better understand the research from an Indigenous lens. This issue was of particular importance in the writing of the final study in this thesis, as the paper aimed to evaluate the initiative from the perspective of Indigenous family members of children who had been sexually abused. I have worked with Indigenous Researcher, Janis Koolmatrie, on this paper, which has allowed a significant insight into how these Indigenous interviewees have experienced the initiative. Secondly, collaborating with Indigenous Researchers aims to increase the skills of both parties, and helping each researcher learn from the skill base of the other.

Research burden on Indigenous peoples. One of the reasons Indigenous peoples have described research as a ‘dirty’ word (Smith, 2012) was the experience of researchers coming into communities, extracting data, and giving nothing in return. The burden of this research has been keenly felt by Indigenous peoples around the world (Bainbridge, Tsey, et al., 2015). In Studies 1-4 in this thesis, all data were obtained from administrative data sources, and have not added to the research burden on Indigenous peoples. The data were collected from pre-existing police databases, with approval from all relevant ethics committees. All data items were anonymised. Interviews from the final study were collected for earlier evaluations of the initiative. Using the interviews in this thesis has added value to the original data, without requiring additional information from Indigenous participants.
The researcher in context of the research.

The protocol for introducing one’s self to other Indigenous people is to 
provide information about one’s cultural location, so that connection can be 
made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established. In 
providing these details, I am claiming and declaring my genealogy, my 
ancestry and my position as a researcher and author (Martin, 2003, p 205).

How one positions oneself as a researcher in the context of researching an 
Indigenous topic has been considered an essential requirement by many Indigenous 
researchers (Martin, 2003). Non-Indigenous researchers also bring to research their 
own lens and background, and providing contextual information on the non-
Indigenous researcher has also been deemed important (Koolmatrie, 2016). I now 
briefly outline what is relevant from my background, to inform the process of 
understanding the lens through which this thesis has been written.

I became involved with this project due to my quantitative statistical skills. I 
have a Master’s degree in Applied Statistics, and expertise working with large 
datasets. I also have had some experience with Indigenous communities, as I stayed 
for a few months in Ngukurr, in South West Arnhem land, Northern Territory, in the 
late 1980s. At the time, I visited a number of communities in Eastern Arnhem Land, 
as well as the communities of Papunya and Yuendumu in Central Australia. I found 
my experiences visiting these places hard to reconcile at the time, but they have been 
invaluable to me in approaching this topic, and informing an understanding of the 
outcomes of this research.
Placing the thesis in context

Although Indigenous peoples have been extensively studied, or over-studied, there has also been a high demand for a better understanding of Indigenous issues, and criticism of the lack of reliable information on criminal justice outcomes for Indigenous peoples (Calma, 2006; Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, 2008). This poses both a paradox and a dilemma for the non-Indigenous researcher, when charged with producing critical information on a highly sensitive topic, such as child sexual abuse in Australian Indigenous communities. How this issue is presented is of great importance, as the way a problem is presented will determine which issues are addressed, and which will not be tackled (Bacchi, 1999).

As one of the ten ‘key challenges in addressing family violence and abuse’, Calma stated that it was imperative to obtain accurate statistics on family violence crimes in Indigenous communities, and to ensure that Indigenous children had equal access to justice under the law (Calma, 2006). It is in this context that the current thesis is presented. This thesis, and the associated publications, aimed to produce information that was of practical use on this topic, and to communicate possibilities for addressing issues of child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities.

Summary

This chapter has described the context for conducting research on Indigenous communities. The thesis has attempted to address the questions raised in this chapter using a number of guiding principles. In particular, acknowledging Indigenous Research and its tenants has been essential to the success, or otherwise, of this
venture. Building relationships, collaboration and giving back are important to Indigenous communities, and have been discussed and addressed here.
CHAPTER FOUR: ATTRITION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CASES

(Studies 1 and 2)

This chapter presents the first two empirical studies of this thesis. Study 1 investigates differences in attrition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases of child sexual abuse. Predictors of differences found in attrition in Study 1 are further explored in Study 2.

This paper has been accepted for publication in Psychology, Public Policy and Law. This journal has specific guidelines for structure, formatting and referencing, and this paper was prepared in accordance with these guidelines.
The attrition of Indigenous and non-Indigenous child sexual abuse cases in two Australian jurisdictions

Cate Bailey, Martine Powell, Sonja P. Brubacher

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Abstract

Indigenous children are significantly more likely to be victims of sexual abuse than non-Indigenous children. In order to investigate justice outcomes for Indigenous children, this study aimed to compare Indigenous versus non-Indigenous cases of suspected child sexual abuse as they proceed through the criminal justice system in two Australian jurisdictions. In Study 1, case progression of the two groups was compared at the following 5 stages: forensic disclosure (child disclosed to police in a forensic interview), case charged, case proceeded by public prosecutors, case went to court, and conviction. Results revealed that in both jurisdictions, Indigenous children were less likely than non-Indigenous children to make a forensic disclosure and to have the case proceeded by public prosecutors. These findings suggest that it was more difficult for Indigenous cases of suspected child sexual abuse to proceed through the criminal justice system. A second study investigated which case characteristics predicted forensic disclosure. Previous disclosure by the child and the availability of a corroborating witness were significant predictors of the child disclosing in a forensic interview, in both jurisdictions. In conclusion, Indigenous children were less likely to make a forensic disclosure than non–Indigenous children, and community related variables significantly predicted forensic disclosure, in both cohorts. If an Indigenous child did not disclose within the community, the child was unlikely to disclose to police.

Key words: Child sexual abuse; Indigenous; Aboriginal; Attrition; Disclosure; Community engagement; Criminal justice system
Children from Indigenous minority populations around the world are significantly more likely to be victims of sexual abuse, and yet have poorer outcomes in the criminal justice system than non-Indigenous children (Blackstock et al., 2004; Calma, 2006; Mulligan, 2008; Wild & Anderson, 2007). What is not known is whether these inequalities exist at all stages of the system, or are limited to key attrition points (e.g., at the charging stage, at the trial stage). This question is paramount, as government funding to stimulate change is limited, and without a sufficient understanding of where inequalities lie, it is not possible to target resources effectively to improve outcomes for Indigenous children (New South Wales Ombudsman, 2012).

Even though Indigenous children are less likely to report incidents of sexual abuse to police (Mace & Powell, 2012; Stanley, 2003), the rates of sexual abuse against this population, globally, are estimated to be around two to eight times that of non-Indigenous children (Australia: Gordon et al., 2002; Guthridge et al., 2012; Stanley et al., 2003; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011; Trocmé et al., 2004; Wynd, 2013). There have been numerous government reports written on child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities; however, few improvements have been apparent (Adelson, 2005; Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2012; Guthridge et al., 2012).

Indigenous community leaders and government documents have repeatedly requested improved data collection and statistics on the reporting and prosecution of sexual crimes against children, in order to better understand how these crimes can be addressed (Australian Legal Reform Commission, 2010; Calma, 2006; New South Wales Ombudsman, 2012). This information is critical for identifying issues,
ensuring accountability and monitoring possible solutions. As one of the ten key challenges in addressing family violence and abuse, Calma stated that it is imperative to obtain accurate statistics on family violence crimes in Indigenous communities, and to ensure that Indigenous children have equal access to justice under the law. The studies presented here are situated within this context, utilising data from two Australian jurisdictions on attrition rates of cases of sexual abuse for Indigenous children.

In order to orient the international reader to the Indigenous context in Australia, the following literature review has been organised around two goals: 1) to provide a general overview of attrition in child sexual abuse cases, and 2) to describe some of the issues associated with Indigenous children accessing and remaining in the criminal justice system.

**An overview of attrition in child sexual abuse cases**

Only a small proportion of child sexual abuses are ever reported to police (Finkelhor, 1994; Hunter, 2008; London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005), and cases that do enter the criminal justice system encounter a range of obstacles that prevent many of them from being charged, prosecuted, or convicted (Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System, 2009; Criminal Justice Sexual Offences Taskforce, 2005; Daly & Bouhours, 2010; Lievore, 2003; Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2004). Lack of retention of these cases through the criminal justice process is defined as attrition. Key attrition points described in prior literature have included: the police investigation stage, whether a case is charged by police, whether a case proceeds to
Two comprehensive Australian studies identified the police investigative phase as the point of highest attrition in child sexual abuse cases (Fitzgerald, 2006; Wundersitz, 2003). Fitzgerald (2006) found that for child sexual abuse cases, 28% of incidents were resolved (proceeded or dismissed) within 180 days of reporting, while the remainder took longer (see also Daly & Bouhours, 2010). Fitzgerald stated that only a limited understanding could be ascertained from the data regarding why the charge and conviction rates for cases of sexual assault were so low. In cases that were cleared without charges being laid, police notation commonly stated “arrest not desired” or “no formal action,” leaving a large gap in understanding. Inability to identify suspects, the withdrawal of complaints by victims, a belief by the police that there was insufficient evidence, and lack of witness credibility were cited by Daly and Bouhours as reasons that cases may not proceed to being charged by police. Less than one third of total reported cases of child and adult sexual abuse were found to be charged by police, and only 20% of total reported cases actually proceeded to court (Daly & Bouhours, 2010). This suggests that a significant number of cases were not proceeded with after being charged. Fitzgerald (2006) reported that in the New South Wales courts, 23.3% of charges in all sexual abuse cases were discontinued as a result of an application by public prosecutors, compared to 8.4% of all other offences. Wundersitz (2003) stated that the high number of cases where a subsequent court file could not be found corresponded with anecdotal evidence that many cases did not proceed through the adjudication stage.
Final conviction rates for reported cases of sexual abuse in the general population are typically found to be low, with 12.5% of all reported cases convicted of a sexual offence, and 6.5% of all reported cases convicted of the offence that was originally charged (Daly & Bouhours, 2010). Whilst plea bargaining (or plea negotiation) has a place in Australian criminal proceedings, unfortunately there is no external data reported on this aspect of the law (Flynn & Fitz-Gibbon, 2011). (Plea bargaining is an agreement between prosecutor and defendant whereby the defendant pleads guilty to a lesser charge in exchange for a more lenient sentence or the dropping of some of the charges.) For child sexual abuse cases, Fitzgerald (2006) found that approximately 15% of all reports of child sexual abuse resulted in the initiation of criminal proceedings against a suspected offender, of which just over half were convicted.

Despite general agreement that there are entrenched difficulties in proceeding child sexual abuse cases, reasons for the high attrition rates of cases of sexual abuse are not well understood (Eastwood, Kift, & Grace, 2006). Challenges are further multiplied when the child is Indigenous (Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, 2008). Some of the factors that may impact on the ability of alleged sexually abused Indigenous children to access the criminal justice system will now be discussed.

Access to the criminal justice system for Indigenous children

The relationship between Indigenous communities and the law enforcement officers and human service agencies that serve them has been eroded over generations, in part due to the removal of children from their communities (Cunneen,
Having their children taken is a well-founded fear for many Indigenous people, as is reflected in the high numbers of Indigenous children in out of home care in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011; Berlyn et al., 2011; Commissioner for children and young people, 2015) and Canada (Trocmé et al., 2004). The legacy of the stolen generations, where large numbers of Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families, has resulted in ongoing grief and loss for Indigenous communities in these two countries (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Bromfield & Holzer, 2008; Cassidy, 2006; Dudgeon et al., 2014; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Funston, 2013; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997; O’Sullivan, 2005; Willis, 2011). Poor relationships with authorities may affect both the child’s willingness to report abuse and whether they will disclose in a forensic interview. Further, these relationships may affect whether family or community members will come forward as corroborating witnesses.

The issue of sexual abuse of children in Indigenous communities is embedded within the high rates of family violence experienced, particularly against women and children (Funston, 2013; Gone, 2013; Keel, 2004; Sutton, 2011; Wild & Anderson, 2007). Families can have considerable fear of the consequences of disclosing abuse, which can include threats from the offender and the offender’s family (Stanley et al., 2003). Threats can also jeopardise the willingness of children and families to proceed to court. Feelings of shame may be differently expressed (Hamilton et al., 2016; Sharifian, 2005), and differences in communication styles may also affect outcomes for Indigenous children (Eades, 1982, 2000). These factors may affect whether a
child is willing to disclose to family or community members, and may also be a factor in whether reporting of the case is delayed.

A lack of understanding that some sexual behaviours are actually abusive and not acceptable is evident among some Indigenous groups (Gordon et al., 2002). In their 2007 report, "Little Children Are Sacred", Wild and Anderson referred to concerns expressed by Indigenous leaders and community members about a lowering of cultural restraints on sexual behaviour, resulting from the breaking down of Indigenous culture and the influence of the darker aspects of the dominant culture. The authors stated that the number of single parents and neglected children was increasing, and that aggressive sexual behaviour was rising for both boys and girls. Higher numbers of under-aged pregnancies and children with sexually transmitted diseases in these communities may lead to a greater degree of physical evidence in reported cases of child sexual abuse of Indigenous children, which could, in turn, help these cases proceed successfully through the criminal justice system (Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, 2008).

Reporting and disclosing child sexual abuse is difficult for any cultural group. This literature review has described how there may be added layers of complexity for Indigenous children, due to community factors and relationships between community and service providers. Indigenous children may experience additional difficulties when reporting and disclosing abuse, and in proceeding a case through the criminal justice system.

The overall aim of the current paper was to investigate whether attrition rates at key points of the legal process differed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children alleged to have had illegal sexual contact with adults. If so, were these
inequalities found at all stages of the criminal justice system, or were they focussed on particular attrition points? As Indigenous populations are heterogeneous, two geographically distinct jurisdictions were studied to determine the stability of the results between different areas. The two jurisdictions had different demographics, with Indigenous persons making up 3-4% of the population in Jurisdiction A, and approximately 30% of the population in Jurisdiction B (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Jurisdiction A has approximately ten times the population of Jurisdiction B (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). This paper presents two studies. The first study aimed to compare the progression of Indigenous verses non-Indigenous cases of suspected child sexual abuse from initial report to conviction. The second study investigated which variables predicted differences in progression rates found in the first study.

**Method**

The current studies have been conducted in accordance with the principals of the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012), and within the ethics guidelines as outlined in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2013) report: *Researching Right Way; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Ethics: A Domestic and International Review*. Indigenous peoples have been some of the most researched communities for decades, mostly through the ‘lens’ of non-Indigenous researchers (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2013). There has been little improvement in outcomes for those studied (Bainbridge, McCalman, Clifford, & Tsey, 2015). The
current analyses have not added to the research burden on Indigenous Australians, as
the data used were collected for administrative purposes. Further, it is strongly hoped
that the dissemination of this information will enable a more targeted and effective
policy approach, thereby fulfilling an expectation that the research will give back to
the communities represented in the data.

Procedure

Data collection was approved by the University Human Research Ethics
Committee and the research committees associated with the relevant jurisdictions.
Data were obtained from a search of the police information management systems of
two jurisdictions for all cases of suspected child sexual abuse for the allocated time
frames, by setting parameters for date and type of offence and collating the relevant
case identification numbers. Each case was then read in its entirety and the relevant
data were extracted for child, alleged offender, and offence variables. All cases were
de-identified. Cases were included if the child was between 3 and 16 years of age
and the alleged offender was 10 years or older at the time of the report.

Data extraction for the calculation of attrition rates is difficult due to the
complexities of the criminal justice system (Quadara, 2014; Wundersitz, 2003). The
lack of one-to-one relationships between variables means that multiple offences,
offenders, and victims can be related to each incident. In the current studies, the
protocol proposed by Walsh, Jones, Cross, and Lippert (2008) to randomly select a
victim and offender pair for each child sexual abuse incident was adopted to deal
with this issue. An exception to this procedure occurred when there were missing
data within cases. In these instances, the alleged victim or suspect with the most
complete data was selected.
Progression stages (or attrition points) have been defined differently by many researchers, and generally have less level of detail than the those presented in the current paper (Daly & Bouhours, 2010). In the current studies, the following five progression stages were examined: whether the child disclosed the abuse in a forensic interview (forensic disclosure), whether the case was charged by police (charged), whether prosecutors from the Department of Public Prosecution agreed to take the case, (proceeded by DPP), whether the case went to court (proceeded to trial), and whether the case was convicted (convicted). Whilst attrition is the number of cases lost at each stage, progression is the number of cases that remain at each stage of the criminal justice system.

Participants

The dataset for Jurisdiction A contained all cases of suspected child sexual abuse reports within this jurisdiction during 2011. The initial data file held reports of 815 incidents involving 1967 offences, 925 children and 895 alleged offenders; however, 249 incident reports were unusable for this study (30.6%) due to missing data on the child’s Indigenous status. Of the 566 incident reports that remained, 125 cases were from Indigenous children and 441 were from non-Indigenous children. Mean age of all children at the time of the report was 11.3 years ($SD = 3.67$, range = 3–16) of whom 80.6% were female. The mean age of the alleged offenders was 32.4 years ($SD = 15.96$, range = 11–78) years.

The dataset for Jurisdiction B contained all cases of suspected child sexual abuse reported in that jurisdiction for the five years between mid-2009 and mid-2014. The initial data file held reports of 657 incidents involving 1117 offences, 727 children and 687 alleged offenders. Forty cases (6.1%) had missing data for child’s
Indigenous status and were not included. Of the 617 incident reports that remained, 364 cases were from Indigenous children and 253 were from non-Indigenous children. The mean age of all children at the time of the report was 12.2 years ($SD = 3.41$, range $= 3–16$) of whom 86.7% were female. The mean age of the alleged offenders was 27.4 years ($SD = 14.3$, range $= 10–81$) years.

Due to the large segment of missing data on child’s Indigenous status in Jurisdiction A, a missing data analysis was conducted using Chi-square tests for missing versus not missing child’s Indigenous status, on a range of variables. Cases with missing data for child’s Indigenous status were significantly more likely to have the following characteristics: the child was under five years old, the child was male, the alleged offender was not a stranger, and the case was not charged, $\chi^2 s \geq 5.22$, $ps \leq .02$. There were no significant differences in regards to severity (penetrative; non-penetrative), or whether the child had a forensic interview or disclosed in the interview, and whether the alleged offender was Indigenous, $\chi^2 s \leq 1.81$, $ps \geq 41$. Thus, although missing data on child’s Indigenous status were more common in less represented groups (such as younger children and boys), up until the case was charged there was no indication that the cases were treated differently (e.g. interview/forensic disclosure rates). The differences in charge rates are an indication that this is the point at which missing data variables would be corrected in the information management system. Where a case did not proceed, then the missing data would not have been checked. Where the child’s Indigenous status was missing, the alleged offender’s Indigenous status was also significantly more likely to be missing, $\chi^2 (1, N = 261) = 10.12$, $p = .001$. 
A missing data analysis for child’s Indigenous status in Jurisdiction B revealed that there were no significant differences in child’s Indigenous status (missing verses not missing) on any of the variables. Missing data in the remaining variables were generally higher in Jurisdiction A than in Jurisdiction B (in the data where child’s Indigenous status was available). Both datasets had missing data for relationship between the child and the alleged offender (6.5% and 17.2% respectively). In Jurisdiction A there were missing data for severity (17.1%) and frequency (13.1%). The variables for previous disclosure (both jurisdictions) and delay (Jurisdiction A) had less than five percent of missing data, and all other variables were complete.

All cases coming before investigators were examined, and the rate of unfounded cases (cases without foundation, or untrue cases) presenting to authorities was unknown. It must be noted here that failure to convict is not necessarily a failure of the justice system. Whilst in cases such as homicide or robbery it is clear that a crime has occurred, in cases of sexual abuse there is the possibility that the crime did not occur, and conviction outcomes need to be considered in this light. In order to test whether cases that were possibly unfounded (cases with little evidence) were more prevalent across cultural groups, cases where there was no disclosure, no corroborating witnesses and no physical evidence were examined by child’s Indigenous status. Chi-square tests indicated that in Jurisdiction A, 17.6 % of Indigenous cases fit this criteria, compared to 18.4 % of non-Indigenous cases, ($\chi^2 (2, N = 617) = 0.88, p = .35$). In Jurisdiction B, chi-square tests indicated that 24.2 % of Indigenous cases fit this criteria, compared to 20.9 % of non-Indigenous cases, ($\chi^2 (2, N = 566) = .04, p=.84$). These results suggest that there were no statistically
significant differences between the proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases that might be unfounded in either Jurisdiction.

**Variables**

Variables were defined similarly in both datasets. Where variables with missing data were entered into a model, they were adjusted to variable = yes versus variable = no or unknown in order to maintain the sample size and not skew results due to missing data, nor overly inflate the degrees of freedom. (All variables where this occurred were checked in the model with the missing data as a group in the variable, and all were found to be consistent with the variables as entered). Child-related variables were: child’s age (3–7, 8–12, 13–16), gender (male/female), and Indigenous status (yes/no). Age was used as a categorical variable as it has previously been found that the relationship between age and disclosure was non-linear, with mid-aged children more likely to disclose than younger or older children (Leach, Powell, & Anglim, in review). Case characteristics were: previous disclosure (child had disclosed previously to a family or community member or service provider), severity (penetrative/non-penetrative/non-contact; penetrative versus non-penetrative in the regression models), frequency (single; repeated), delay (the report was more than 12 months after the offence: yes/no), corroborating witness (family or community member or service provider gave evidence to police), relationship of child to alleged offender (immediate family: parent, step-parent, sibling; other family: uncle, grandparent, cousin; known associate; stranger) and availability of physical evidence (yes/no).
Data analysis

Data analysis for both studies was carried out using SPSS version 23. In Study 1, chi-square tests were used for progression analyses. Percentage difference and Phi coefficients were presented as effect sizes: phi: .01 is considered a small effect, .30 is considered a medium effect, and .50 is considered a large effect (Pallant, 2011). In Study 2, bivariate statistics by forensic disclosure (yes/no) were obtained using chi-square tests for all predictive variables. Variables with $p$ values lower than .2 were then used as predictive variables in binary logistic regression analyses to determine which variables significantly predicted forensic disclosure in each jurisdiction (Mickey & Greenland, 1989).

Results

The aim of the first study was to compare the progression rates of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous cases through the police and court systems. Firstly, the number of cases that remain in the criminal justice system, as a percentage of all cases, was calculated using a series of chi-square tests. This analysis is presented in Figure 4.1 for both jurisdictions.

The first pane of Figure 4.1 presents the percentages of cases that remain active at each progression stage between report and conviction for Jurisdiction A. Only 39% of Indigenous cases contained a forensic disclosure (child disclosed to police in a forensic interview) compared to 69% of non-Indigenous cases. This had a
**Figure 4.1.** Progression of cases of child sexual abuse by child’s Indigenous status in Jurisdictions A and B

Chi-square significant difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001; DPP: Department of Public Prosecutions

In Jurisdiction A there were 39 cases charged without forensic disclosure by the child (9.7% of cases overall, 9.1% for Indigenous and 9.8% for non-Indigenous cases); in Jurisdiction B there were 27 cases charged without forensic disclosure by the child (4.2% of cases overall, 5.2% for Indigenous and 2.6% for non-Indigenous cases).
Figure downstream effect such that a total of only 19% of Indigenous cases were successfully prosecuted in the final stage compared to 30% of non-Indigenous cases. There were significant differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases at each progression point.

The second pane of Figure 4.1 presents the percentages of cases that remain active at each stage between report and conviction for Jurisdiction B. There were significant differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases at the forensic disclosure stage, but not at other progression points. Convictions were similar, with Indigenous cases only 2% less likely to be convicted than non-Indigenous cases.

The second progression analysis investigated how many cases progressed as a percentage of how many remained at each stage, rather than as a percentage of the whole. The analysis for Jurisdiction A is displayed in the first section of Table 4.1. There were two stages where progression was significantly different for Indigenous cases: forensic disclosure and proceeded by the Department of Public Prosecutions. Indigenous cases were 30.0% less likely to remain at the forensic disclosure stage, and 17.9% less likely to be proceeded by the Department of Public Prosecutions than non-Indigenous cases. There were no significant differences between groups when cases were disclosed but not charged, proceeded but dismissed, or acquitted at trial.

The progression of cases for Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases for Jurisdiction B is displayed in the second section of Table 4.1. As in Jurisdiction A, there were two stages where attrition was significantly different for Indigenous cases: forensic disclosure and proceeded by the Department of Public Prosecutions.
Table 4.1

Numbers, means and chi-square statistics for progression of reported cases of child sexual abuse, relative to the previous stage, by child’s Indigenous status.

**Jurisdictions A and B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indigenous # (%)</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous # (%)</th>
<th>Total # (%)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% difference</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>phi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jurisdiction A</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>566</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>49 (39.2)</td>
<td>303 (68.7)</td>
<td>352 (62.2)</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>-29.5</td>
<td>36.06</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charged</td>
<td>38 (70.4)</td>
<td>202 (60.8)</td>
<td>240 (61.7)</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proceeded by DPP</td>
<td>28 (73.7)</td>
<td>185 (91.6)</td>
<td>213 (88.8)</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>-17.9</td>
<td>10.26</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proceeded by judge</td>
<td>26 (92.9)</td>
<td>158 (85.4)</td>
<td>184 (32.3)</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convicted</td>
<td>24 (92.3)</td>
<td>133 (84.2)</td>
<td>157 (85.3)</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jurisdiction B</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>617</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>230 (63.2)</td>
<td>180 (71.1)</td>
<td>410 (66.5)</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>-7.9</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charged</td>
<td>182 (68.2)</td>
<td>118 (59.3)</td>
<td>300 (64.4)</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proceeded by DPP</td>
<td>99 (61.9)</td>
<td>81 (78.6)</td>
<td>180 (68.4)</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>-16.7</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proceeded by judge</td>
<td>92 (92.6)</td>
<td>76 (93.8)</td>
<td>168 (93.3)</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convicted</td>
<td>84 (91.3)</td>
<td>63 (82.9)</td>
<td>147 (87.5)</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( df = 1 \) in all tests
Indigenous cases were 7.9% less likely to remain at the forensic disclosure stage, and 16.7% less likely be proceeded by the Department of Public Prosecutions than non-Indigenous cases. Again, there were no significant differences between groups when cases were disclosed but not charged, proceeded but dismissed, or acquitted at trial.

The similarities between the two jurisdictions regarding which analyses were significant were striking. In both jurisdictions, differences between the two cultural groups for forensic disclosure and proceeded by the Director of Public Prosecutions were significant, whilst the remaining analyses were not. Whilst the analyses from this section reveal that for both cultural groups, the greatest point of loss of progression (also known as attrition) was at forensic disclosure, this attrition was significantly higher for Indigenous cases than non-Indigenous cases in both jurisdictions. Differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases in the forensic disclosure analysis were particularly large in Jurisdiction A.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous case characteristics were then compared over a range of variables, as shown in Tables 4.2a and 4.2b. In both jurisdictions, Indigenous children were found to be significantly less likely to have disclosed previously (14% less in Jurisdiction A and 23% less in Jurisdiction B). In Jurisdiction A, Indigenous cases were 21% less likely to have a corroborating witness and 25% less likely to have physical evidence. In Jurisdiction B, Indigenous cases were 18% more likely to be severe and it was 18% less likely for the alleged offender to be a stranger in Indigenous cases than in non-Indigenous cases. There were no differences between the two cultural groups on age, gender, frequency or delay for either jurisdiction.
Table 4.2a

Numbers, percentages, and Chi-square statistics for case characteristics by Indigenous status, Jurisdiction A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indigenous # (%)</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous # (%)</th>
<th>% difference</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>125 (22.1)</td>
<td>441 (77.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 3–7 years</td>
<td>15 (12.0)</td>
<td>92 (20.9)</td>
<td>-8.9</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 8–12 years</td>
<td>38 (30.4)</td>
<td>127 (28.8)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 13–16 years</td>
<td>72 (57.6)</td>
<td>222 (50.3)</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender, female</strong></td>
<td>100 (80.0)</td>
<td>356 (80.7)</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous disclosure</strong></td>
<td>80 (70.2)</td>
<td>357 (84.2)</td>
<td>-14.0</td>
<td>11.59</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Severity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penetrative</td>
<td>36 (43.9)</td>
<td>165 (42.6)</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>32 (39.0)</td>
<td>155 (40.1)</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Contact</td>
<td>14 (17.1)</td>
<td>67 (17.3)</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency (more than once)</strong></td>
<td>28 (32.9)</td>
<td>152 (37.3)</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delayed</strong></td>
<td>20 (17.7)</td>
<td>65 (15.1)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corroborating witness</strong></td>
<td>52 (41.6)</td>
<td>277 (62.8)</td>
<td>-21.2</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Familial</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate familya</td>
<td>26 (26.3)</td>
<td>96 (22.3)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other familyb</td>
<td>13 (13.1)</td>
<td>41 (9.5)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known associate</td>
<td>55 (55.6)</td>
<td>222 (51.6)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>5 (5.1)</td>
<td>71 (16.5)</td>
<td>-11.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical evidence</strong></td>
<td>42 (33.6)</td>
<td>39 (8.8)</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>48.68</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Parent, sibling, step parent b Uncle, grandfather, cousin etc
Table 4.2b

Numbers, percentages, and Chi-square statistics for case characteristics by

Indigenous status, Jurisdiction B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indigenous # (%)</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous # (%)</th>
<th>% difference</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>364 (59.0)</td>
<td>253 (41.0)</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>617</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 3–7 years</td>
<td>48 (13.3)</td>
<td>37 (14.7)</td>
<td>-1.4</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 8–12 years</td>
<td>104 (28.7)</td>
<td>52 (20.7)</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 13–16 years</td>
<td>210 (58.0)</td>
<td>162 (64.5)</td>
<td>-6.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender, female</td>
<td>319 (87.6)</td>
<td>220 (87.0)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous disclosure</td>
<td>208 (58.8)</td>
<td>192 (77.4)</td>
<td>-18.6</td>
<td>22.78</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21.37</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penetrative</td>
<td>212 (58.2)</td>
<td>101 (39.9)</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>144 (39.6)</td>
<td>139 (54.9)</td>
<td>-15.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Contact</td>
<td>8 (2.2)</td>
<td>13 (5.1)</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency (more than once)</td>
<td>83 (22.8)</td>
<td>61 (24.1)</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td>16 (4.4)</td>
<td>6 (2.4)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroborating witness</td>
<td>65 (17.9)</td>
<td>49 (19.4)</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37.52</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate familya</td>
<td>68 (24.2)</td>
<td>41 (18.0)</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other familyb</td>
<td>35 (12.5)</td>
<td>8 (3.5)</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known associate</td>
<td>151 (53.7)</td>
<td>116 (50.9)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>27 (9.6)</td>
<td>63 (27.6)</td>
<td>-18.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical evidence</td>
<td>109 (29.9)</td>
<td>57 (22.5)</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Parent, sibling, step parent  

b Uncle, grandfather, cousin etc
In summary, this study found that forensic disclosure had a strong effect on criminal justice outcomes in Jurisdiction A and a moderate effect in Jurisdiction B. Disclosure-related variables such as previous disclosure (in both jurisdictions) and corroborating witness (in Jurisdiction A) were significantly different between the cultural groups, with Indigenous children less likely than non-Indigenous children to discuss the abuse previous to the report, and less likely to have this report corroborated. Unfortunately, whilst there were significant differences between groups regarding whether cases were progressed by the Department of Public Prosecutions, the data files included no further information as to why this was so. Further information was available, however, for predicting whether a child would make a forensic disclosure. Thus, the following study investigated predictors of forensic disclosure in both jurisdictions.

**Study 2**

The second study aimed to determine what factors may influence children in disclosing sexual abuse to police. Available variables from the datasets sourced from the police information management systems of these two jurisdictions were utilised. Eight variables that were available in the current datasets, and that were found in prior research to be significantly related to forensic disclosure in the general community, were selected for analysis: child’s age, child’s gender, severity (penetrative; non-penetrative), prior disclosure, frequency (single; repeated), delay (reported within 12 months of incident; reported 12 months or more after incident), relationship to offender (familial; non-familial), and corroborating witnesses (present; absent) (Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003; I.
Hershkowitz, Horowitz, & Lamb, 2007; Lippert, Cross, Jones, & Walsh, 2008; Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2013; Pipe et al., 2007).

**Bivariate analyses by forensic disclosure.** The eight variables were analysed by whether the child disclosed in a forensic interview (yes/no) and are shown in Table 4.3 for both jurisdictions. Percentages are presented within forensic disclosure (rather than within Indigenous status). In both jurisdictions, cases where there had been a prior disclosure and cases with a corroborating witness were significantly more likely to have a forensic disclosure. Age was also significantly different in both jurisdictions, with mid-aged children most likely to disclose. In Jurisdiction A, cases that were reported after twelve months (delayed) were significantly more likely to disclose.

**Logistic regression analyses to predict forensic disclosure.** A logistic regression model was constructed for each jurisdiction to determine which variables significantly predicted disclosure to police. Variables with a $p$-value below .2 in the bivariate analyses were selected for inclusion, in line with recommendations by Mickey and Greenland (1989), as well as the variable for child’s Indigenous status. In Jurisdiction A, all variables except for severity, frequency and familial were significantly below $p = .2$ and were included in the model. In Jurisdiction B, all variables except gender, frequency and familial had $p$ values below .2, and were included in the model. Outcomes from these two models are contained in Table 4.4a.
Table 4.3
Numbers, percentages within variable, and Chi-square statistics by variables predictive of disclosure for both jurisdictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disclosure</th>
<th>Jurisdiction A</th>
<th>Jurisdiction B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No disclosure</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>χ²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>352 (62.2)</td>
<td>214 (37.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–7</td>
<td>55 (51.4)</td>
<td>55 (48.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8–12</td>
<td>119 (72.1)</td>
<td>46 (27.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>295 (64.7)</td>
<td>161 (35.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57 (51.8)</td>
<td>53 (48.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior disclosure</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>58.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>305 (69.8)</td>
<td>132 (30.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>29 (28.7)</td>
<td>72 (71.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>22.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penetration</td>
<td>133 (66.2)</td>
<td>68 (33.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No penetration</td>
<td>219 (60.0)</td>
<td>146 (40.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>1.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repeated</td>
<td>128 (71.4)</td>
<td>52 (28.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>208 (66.7)</td>
<td>104 (33.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>8.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 12 months</td>
<td>66 (77.6)</td>
<td>19 (22.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 12 months</td>
<td>281 (61.4)</td>
<td>177 (38.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroborating witness</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>101.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one</td>
<td>262 (79.6)</td>
<td>67 (20.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>90 (38.0)</td>
<td>147 (62.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate family</td>
<td>84 (68.9)</td>
<td>38 (31.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not immediate family</td>
<td>40 (74.1)</td>
<td>14 (25.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known associate</td>
<td>171 (61.7)</td>
<td>106 (38.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>54 (71.1)</td>
<td>22 (28.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Jurisdiction A, the logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2 (7, N = 590) = 187.36, p < .001$, indicating that the model distinguished between cases that were and were not disclosed. The Hosmer and Lemeshow Test was not significant ($p = .83$) indicating that the model was a good fit. The model correctly explained between 28.5% (Cox and Snell $R^2$) and 38.7% (Nagelkerke $R^2$) of the variance in charge status, and correctly classified 75.7% of cases.

Five variables were found to strongly predict forensic disclosure in Jurisdiction A. Non-Indigenous children were almost three times more likely to disclose than Indigenous children, mid-aged children were 2.7 times more likely to disclose than younger children, children who had disclosed previously were five times more likely to disclose than children who had not previously disclosed, children with a delayed report were almost twice as likely to disclose, and children who had at least one corroborating witness were 5.6 times more likely to disclose than children without a corroborating witness.

In Jurisdiction B, the logistic regression model containing the six selected predictors was statistically significant, $\chi^2 (7, N = 691) = 88.85, p < .001$, indicating that the model distinguished between cases that were and were not disclosed. The Hosmer and Lemeshow Test was not significant ($p = .94$) indicating that the model was a good fit. The model correctly explained between 13.2% (Cox and Snell $R^2$) and 18.5% (Nagelkerke $R^2$) of the variance in disclosure status, and correctly classified 71.5% of cases. Three variables significantly predicted forensic disclosure in Jurisdiction B: mid-aged children were less likely to disclose than younger or older children, children who had disclosed previously were 4.3 times more likely to disclose to police, and, in cases where there was a corroborating witness, children
Table 4.4a

Logistic regression statistics including odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the odds ratios in a model to predict forensic disclosure,

Jurisdictions A and B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>95% C.I.for OR</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Jurisdiction A</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Status</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>17.59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8–12 vs 3–7</td>
<td>-0.97</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>9.82</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8–12 vs 13–16</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.386</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>.26</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous disclosure</td>
<td>-1.63</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>36.33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td>-0.67</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.04</td>
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<td>Corroborating witness</td>
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<td>.21</td>
<td>65.24</td>
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<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>9.51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.002</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jurisdiction B</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Indigenous Status</td>
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<td>.20</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.351</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's age</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8–12 vs 3–7</td>
<td>-0.67</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8–12 vs 13–16</td>
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<td>.24</td>
<td>4.08</td>
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<td>.043</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.01</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity (Pen)</td>
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<td>0.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.676</td>
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<td>3.35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroborating witness</td>
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<td>.28</td>
<td>15.28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>20.90</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were three times more likely to disclose to police. Indigenous status was not significant in this model.

In order to investigate whether the predictors were behaving differently in the Indigenous and non-Indigenous samples in Jurisdiction A (where Indigenous status was a significant predictor of forensic disclosure in the model), interaction effects were entered into the model, and subsequently the logistic regression model was re-run for each cultural group, as shown in Table 4.4b. Non-significant variables (child gender and delayed cases) were removed from the model, and three interaction effects were added (child’s Indigenous status by age group, previous disclosure and corroborating witness). The model statistics were statistically significant: $\chi^2(9, N = 566) = 173.18, p < .001$; Hosmer and Lemeshow Test, $p = .91$; the model correctly explained between 27.5% (Cox and Snell R$^2$) and 37.5% (Nagelkerke R$^2$) of the variance in disclosure status, and correctly classified 76.4% of cases. Interaction effects were significant for Indigenous status by child’s age and marginally significant for Indigenous status by previous disclosure.

To investigate the implications of the significant interaction effects, two separate models for each cohort in Jurisdiction A were conducted, containing the predictors that were entered in the full models. The results are presented in the second two panes of Table 4.4b. The model statistics for the Indigenous sample of Jurisdiction A were statistically significant: $\chi^2(6, N = 131) = 64.70, p < .001$; Hosmer and Lemeshow Test, $p = .97$; the model correctly explained between 41.7% (Cox and Snell R$^2$) and 56.6% (Nagelkerke R$^2$) of the variance in disclosure status, and correctly classified 79.2% of cases. The variance explained was considerably
Table 4.4b

Logistic regression statistics including odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the odds ratios in a model to predict forensic disclosure in Jurisdiction A with interaction effects, and then with separate models for Indigenous and non-Indigenous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>95% C.I for OR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Indigenous Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12 vs 3-7</td>
<td>-1.15</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.07 1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12 vs 13-16</td>
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<td>6.58</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.41 13.16</td>
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<td>.83</td>
<td>13.20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>20.41</td>
<td>4.00 100.00</td>
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<td>Corroborating Witness</td>
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<td>.50</td>
<td>12.64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>2.24 16.13</td>
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<td>Child's age by Indigenous Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>8-12 vs 3-7</td>
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<td>0.12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.26 6.91</td>
</tr>
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<td>8-12 vs 13-16</td>
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<td>.64</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>1.31 16.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous disclosure by Indigenous Status</td>
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<td>.88</td>
<td>3.63</td>
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<td>.057</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>0.95 30.49</td>
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<td>.81</td>
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<td>0.38 3.42</td>
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<td>7.63</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jurisdiction A- Indigenous</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child's age</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12 vs 3-7</td>
<td>-0.83</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12 vs 13-16</td>
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<td>.62</td>
<td>5.41</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>1.26 14.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>.81</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>1.47 35.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous disclosure</td>
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<td>14.35</td>
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<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>25.04</td>
<td>4.73 132.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corroborating Witness</td>
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<td>.57</td>
<td>14.63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>8.85</td>
<td>2.90 27.07</td>
</tr>
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<td>.92</td>
<td>1.39</td>
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<td>.24</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jurisdiction A- non- Indigenous</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's age</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td></td>
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<td>.33</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.28 4.75</td>
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<td>8-12 vs 13-16</td>
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<td>.29</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.78</td>
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<td>.30</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.63</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.30</td>
<td>19.93</td>
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<td>3.90</td>
<td>2.15 7.09</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corroborating Witness</td>
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<td>.24</td>
<td>50.00</td>
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<td>5.38</td>
<td>3.38 8.58</td>
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<td>.46</td>
<td>24.16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
higher than the complete sample. In the non-Indigenous sample of Jurisdiction B: 
\[ \chi^2(7, N = 459) = 104.08, p < .001; \text{Hosmer and Lemeshow Test, } p = .84; \] the model correctly explained between 21.1\% (Cox and Snell R^2) and 29.5\% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in disclosure status, and correctly classified 75.9\% of cases.

There were some interesting differences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous cohorts in this jurisdiction. Odds ratios reveal that mid-aged children were more than four times more likely to disclose than older children in the Indigenous cohort, and 2.5 times more likely to disclose than younger children in the non-Indigenous cohort. Girls were more than seven times more likely than boys to disclose in the Indigenous cohort, but this variable was not significantly different in the non-Indigenous cohort. Whilst previous disclosure was a significant predictor of forensic disclosure in both cohorts, Indigenous children were 25 times more likely to disclose if they had disclosed previously, compared to almost four times in the non-Indigenous cohort. If an Indigenous child did not disclose previously, it was highly unlikely that they would disclose in a forensic interview.

In summary, previous disclosure and a corroborating witness significantly predicted whether a child would make a forensic disclosure, in both jurisdictions. In Jurisdiction A, child’s Indigenous status significantly predicted forensic disclosure. Significant predictors of whether an Indigenous child in Jurisdiction A would disclose in a forensic interview were previous disclosure, corroborating witness, age and gender. These were similar for non-Indigenous children, but the predictors were not as strong.
Discussion

The overriding finding from this study was that attrition rates differed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases of suspected child sexual abuse. These differences were consistent across the two jurisdictions, despite the demographic differences between them (such as 3–4% versus 30% Indigenous population). Specifically, differences in attrition were restricted to two key points of the legal process. The first key point was forensic disclosure, where the child’s evidence was obtained, and the second key point was whether cases were proceeded by prosecutors. No differences in case progression between groups were found at either the charge or conviction stages, in either of the jurisdictions.

Forensic disclosure of child sexual abuse can be vital in proceeding cases of child sexual abuse through the criminal justice system (Lippert et al., 2008). Whilst case progression was lowest at the forensic disclosure stage for both cultural groups and across both jurisdictions, in the current studies, rates of forensic disclosure were found to be significantly lower for Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous children, particularly in Jurisdiction A. This finding suggests that maximising Indigenous children’s opportunities to disclose is critical.

In the second study, where models were developed to determine predictors of forensic disclosure, Indigenous status was a significant predictor of forensic disclosure in Jurisdiction A, but not in Jurisdiction B. The variables of previous disclosure and corroborating witness were significant predictors of forensic disclosure in both jurisdictions. Whilst age was also a significant predictor, other case characteristics such as severity, whether the abuse was repeated, whether the
report was delayed, and whether the alleged offender was a family member did not significantly predict forensic disclosure.

A closer investigation of predictors of forensic disclosure between the two cultural groups in Jurisdiction A, revealed that the disclosure-related variables were stronger predictors of forensic disclosure for Indigenous children than for non-Indigenous children. Indigenous children who had not disclosed previously, and for whom there was no community member who corroborated their story (and no other corroborating witness), were highly unlikely to disclose to police. Overall, these studies provide a clear picture of the importance of forensic disclosure and disclosure related variables to the outcomes of all cases of suspected child sexual abuse in the justice system, but particularly for Indigenous cases.

Differences in attrition rates for Indigenous cases between the two jurisdictions may be due in some part to the heterogeneity of Indigenous peoples and groups (as documented by Dillon & Westbury, 2007). Demographic differences between the jurisdictions have been described here, but there may also be differences in language, practices and other factors. Non-Indigenous communities may also be heterogeneous, and this could affect comparisons with the Indigenous groups. The two jurisdictions that contributed data to this study had distinctly different population sizes and proportions, and it is possible that the non-Indigenous population was more urban in Jurisdiction A than in Jurisdiction B. It is also possible that there could be systemic differences in policing practices between the two jurisdictions that may not be apparent from the data. Nonetheless, overall findings are strikingly similar across these two jurisdictions.
The relationship between previous disclosure and forensic disclosure suggests that there may be strong disincentives for children who have been abused to disclose within their communities, as well as to the police. A study of court-substantiated physical and sexual abuse revealed that children had disclosed previously in 67% of sexual abuse cases (Rush, Lyon, Ahern, & Quas, 2015). This number is lower than the non-Indigenous rates in our sample which were 84% and 78% respectively, but similar to the Indigenous rates of 70% and 59% respectively for Jurisdictions A and B.

When it comes to disclosing sexual abuse to parents, children have been observed to be able to accurately anticipate parental responses, and were far less inclined to disclose when they expected a negative reaction (Hershkowitz, Lanes, & Lamb, 2007). In order to be able to disclose abuse, Indigenous children may require increased support to tackle issues of shame and the potential consequences of disclosure of sexual abuse on their families and community. This support may enable them to disclose to family or community members, and hence to disclose to police in a forensic interview.

The importance of corroborating witnesses in obtaining a forensic disclosure suggests that family and community support has a strong impact on cases. In a study that investigated attitudes to child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities, the relationship between community and government services was found to be significantly different for Indigenous verses non-Indigenous stakeholders (Bailey, Mace, & Powell, 2015). As compared to non-Indigenous stakeholders, Indigenous stakeholders felt that there were fewer discussions with service providers on the topic of child sexual abuse, and they were also significantly more likely to say that police
and child welfare services did not take reports of child sexual abuse in the community seriously. It is noted that the relationship between police and minority Indigenous communities in many countries is fraught (Cunneen, 2001; Ellerman, 2009; Neugebauer, 1999). Difficulties with these relationships may be reflected in the findings in the current studies, as Indigenous witnesses may be reluctant to come forward with supportive information to the police. These attitudes could have a strong effect on children in their own dealings with police.

The influence of the community on whether a child will disclose to police points to the necessity of engaging communities when designing interventions to improve rates of disclosure. In general, successful programs for Indigenous peoples were cited by the Steering committee of the Review of Government Service Provision (2011) as requiring these main attributes: co-operative approaches between Indigenous peoples and government, community involvement, good governance, and ongoing government support. An holistic and multi-systemic approach is important when targeting an intervention for children, parents and teachers (and implicitly community members) in Indigenous communities (MacIntyre & Carr, 2000). It is also important to use a proactive model of engagement, and encourage government departments to work together (Bunting, 2008; Mace & Powell, 2012).

An example of this approach was the multi-agency child protection strategy implemented in Western Australia under the name of Operation RESET (Mace & Powell, 2012) in 2009. This program was developed in response to a large-scale intervention by the Australian Federal Government to address child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities of the Northern Territory in 2007. Despite the large input of
resources, the Northern Territory Intervention had failed to effect real change in these communities. This was at least in part due to the apparent lack of engagement with Indigenous peoples (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2012; Hunter, 2008; Sorensen, Fowler, Nash, & Bacon, 2010).

Operation RESET employed a proactive, community engagement design. The operation was based on the principles that child sexual abuse must be a shared responsibility, must address the underlying causes and contextual issues, and enhance children’s safety and wellbeing by empowering families and communities. Two published journal articles have evaluated this initiative. A qualitative evaluation highlighted four elements as being important components of the reform: the proactive outreach approach, building capacity, the holistic focus and, in particular, the establishment of relationships that facilitated trust (Mace, Powell, & Benson, 2015). The second paper was a quantitative evaluation that compared intervention areas to non-intervention areas across the state. This evaluation was based on the aims of the intervention to uncover, respond to, and prevent child sexual abuse. Numbers of reports and arrests increased in intervention areas but not in non-intervention areas, indicating that the first two aims of increasing reporting and responding to reports were achieved. The arrest per report rate continued to improve in the post intervention period, indicating that the interventions appeared to be successful in the longer term (Bailey, Mace, Powell, & Benson, 2015). Both evaluations strongly supported the proactive, whole of government, community engagement model as espoused by this initiative.

Reporting child sexual abuse is a necessary step for a case to enter the criminal justice system; however, disclosure during a forensic interview is also
imperative in order for the police to investigate the case. In many cases where child
sexual abuse has been alleged, successful prosecution of the offender can be
completely dependent on the child’s eyewitness testimony (Fogliati & Bussey,
2015). The primary aim of Operation RESET was to increase reporting rates;
however, the strategies used by the operation were strongly consistent with that of
increasing rates of disclosure in the forensic interview, as both required committed
engagement with Indigenous communities. The strong link between community and
forensic disclosure found in the current studies suggests that engaging with
Indigenous communities is essential. Operation RESET is an excellent example of
how this engagement may be implemented.

There were several limitations to the studies presented here. The first
limitation was that we were unable to ascertain, from the available data, whether
cases were verified (or founded). As noted in the method section, there were no
differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases on the percentage of cases
with little evidence (no forensic disclosures, no physical evidence and no
corroborating witnesses). This analysis suggested that Indigenous and non-
Indigenous cases were equally likely to be unfounded cases. Nonetheless, it was
impossible to determine from the available data which cases may be unfounded, and
there remains the possibility that unfounded cases may be more common in either
cohort.

During the course of this analysis, the authors consulted with police experts
working in remote Indigenous communities who described many cases of girls not
wanting to have sex (either with boys their own age or older men), but not
understanding that they could say no. Some children perceived that it was safer to
agree to participate in sex, than to be violently forced into it. In these cases, the concept of consent is quite fraught, and a child in this position would have been unlikely to have made a previous disclosure. Similar examples were contained in some of the police case notes in Jurisdiction B. For instance: “Child presented with STI. She stated that she did not really want to engage in sexual activity but she was not [physically] forced.”

The second limitation was the high level of missing data for the Indigenous status variable, particularly in Jurisdiction A. In general, collection of information for this variable relies on opportunities for people to identify themselves as Indigenous, and on their willingness to do so (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011). Indigenous status is of importance in many policy areas, and was noted by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (2015) as an area where inadequate information was being obtained, even though it was desirable in all administrative datasets. The final limitation was that there was no information regarding plea bargaining in the data, and the authors were unable to determine what effect this may have had on conviction outcomes.

Despite these limitations, the information obtained from these two datasets has enabled an extensive investigation by child’s Indigenous status, and has significantly improved understanding of the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases of suspected child sexual abuse, and attrition of cases of child sexual abuse generally. Given the correspondence of findings across the two jurisdictions within Australia, and the similarity of experiences of Indigenous peoples globally (the effects of colonialism, low socio-economic status, high incarceration rates, and high rates of community violence and youth suicide), the
results observed here may be applicable to Indigenous minority communities in many countries.

Further research is suggested to investigate the finding that, in both jurisdictions, there were significant differences between the percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases that were cleared for trial by public prosecutors. It is possible that Indigenous cases were more likely to be withdrawn by the child and/or their family, perhaps due to fear of, or intimidation by, the offender or the offender’s family (Lievore, 2003; Mace & Powell, 2012; Wundersitz, 2010). This information was not available in the datasets used in the current studies. Anecdotally, prosecutors are thought to be less likely to endorse cases when the child has been the victim of multiple abuses, and therefore may make a less credible witness. Considering that Indigenous children are often exposed to multiple abuse situations, this could be a factor in why these cases are less likely to proceed.

The current studies have shown that there were differences between how Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases of suspected child sexual abuse proceeded through the criminal justice system, and that these differences were focussed on forensic disclosure, disclosure-related variables, and whether a case was proceeded by public prosecutors. Indigenous communities are different from non-Indigenous, as the effects of colonisation and low socio-economic status have normalised high levels of violence in many communities (Keel, 2004). These differences need to be taken into account when programs are developed to address child sexual abuse in these communities. In a climate where resources are scarce, solutions need to be specifically targeted. The studies presented here support a proactive approach with a focus on community engagement. It is hoped that this information will help to focus
support for well-designed programs in these communities, in order to obtain the best possible outcomes for Indigenous child victims of sexual abuse.
CHAPTER FIVE: REPORTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (Study 3)

In Study 3, data from both jurisdictions was used to investigate reporting of child sexual abuse. Reporting rates were compared between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cohorts, and across jurisdictions. Evidence was then compiled from case characteristics and case tracking to better understand differences found in reporting rates between groups.

This paper has been submitted for review to the journal of Child Abuse and Neglect. This journal has specific guidelines for structure, formatting and referencing, and this paper was prepared in accordance with these guidelines.
Reporting rates of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in two
Australian jurisdictions

Cate Bailey, Martine Powell, Sonja Brubacher,

Author notes: Thanks to Mairi Benson, Chelsea Leach and Elli Darwinkel for assistance with data collection. We thank the police commissioners and police data analysts from both jurisdictions for supporting this study.
Abstract

Child sexual abuse is a significant problem in many Indigenous communities; there is also evidence of chronic under-reporting of this crime. This study aimed to compare reporting rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases of child sexual abuse across two Australian jurisdictions. Datasets comprising child sexual abuse reports from the Police Information Management Systems of the two jurisdictions were used to calculate reporting rates, and to compare case characteristics and case progression. Results indicated that the reporting rate for child sexual abuse of Indigenous children was between two and four times that of non-Indigenous children. In the Indigenous cases, the second jurisdiction had lower reporting rates than the first jurisdiction. Further analysis of the Indigenous cases only found that cases in the second jurisdiction were more severe, more likely to have a forensic interview, and more likely for the suspect to be charged, than in the first jurisdiction. However, there were no significant differences in conviction rates between the two jurisdictions. Differences observed in severity and case progression suggest that the lower reporting rates observed in the second jurisdiction may be due to comparatively high levels of under-reporting, rather than lower actual levels of child sexual abuse. In conclusion, reporting rates of child sexual abuse can be better understood when further information, such as case characteristics and case progression rates, is available.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse; Reporting; Indigenous; Aboriginal; Criminal Justice System; Policing.
High rates of child sexual abuse are a significant problem in Indigenous minority communities globally (Blackstock, Trocmé, & Bennett, 2004; Calma, 2006; Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002; Guthridge, Ryan, & Bromfield, 2012; Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004; University of Auckland, 2008; Wild & Anderson, 2007). Further, rates of under-reporting in these communities are estimated to be significantly higher than in non-Indigenous communities, where issues with reporting child sexual abuse to authorities are exacerbated (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009; Bromfield & Holzer, 2008; Stanley, Tomison, & Pocock, 2003). The New South Wales Ombudsman described the number of reported cases of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities as “only the ‘tip of the iceberg’” (2012, p iv).

Addressing child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities is of great concern to both Indigenous community leaders and to government (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Berlyn, Bromfield, & Lamont, 2011; Blackstock et al., 2004; Coorey, 2001; Funston, 2013; Gordon et al., 2002; Mulligan, 2008; Stanley et al., 2003; Trocmé et al., 2004; Wild & Anderson, 2007). Despite enquiries and reforms, child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities has continued to be a problem, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of this issue (Calma, 2006). Data required to adequately investigate these issues have been difficult to obtain (Kerr, 2003; New South Wales Ombudsman, 2012). Furthermore, literature describing the intent, impact and practical implementation of reforms has been scarce (Thompson, Greville, & Param, 2008).
A primary focus of reform in the policing of sexual abuse in Indigenous communities has been to increase reporting rates, so that cases can be brought into the criminal justice system (Mace & Powell, 2012). Police and child protection workers form a dual investigation system in Australia. They are the entry point into the criminal justice system and are crucial in the detection and successful prosecution of child sexual abuse cases (Taylor & Gassner, 2010). In effect, these professionals act as ‘gatekeepers’ for victims access to this system (Kerstetter, 1990). Taylor and Gassner found that victims generally have lack of confidence in both the police and the criminal justice system, which reduces the likelihood of reporting sexual abuse.

Lack of confidence in the criminal justice system is particularly felt by Indigenous victims, for whom barriers to reporting sexual abuse are compounded by the often poor relationships of Indigenous communities with police and welfare agencies (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2012; Hunter, 2008). Relationships between Indigenous communities and service providers have been adversely impacted by the removal of children over generations. The effects of the stolen generation and high rates of out of home care are still significantly affecting Indigenous children (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Bromfield & Holzer, 2008; Dudgeon et al., 2014; Funston, 2013; Willis, 2011). The likelihood of disclosing abuse is increased when the victim has some expectation that their complaints will be acted upon in an appropriate manner, and increase their safety rather than diminish it (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2011). Reporting abuse is increasingly challenging if children fear that it could result in them being removed from their homes (Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, & Cederborg, 2013) For Indigenous families,
feelings of distrust and of there being nowhere to turn have been exacerbated by both historic and contemporary instances of children being taken by authorities.

In order to increase reporting rates, a proactive, whole of government, community engagement approach has been adopted for trial in some areas (Bailey, Mace, & Powell, 2016; Mace & Powell, 2012; Mace, Powell, & Benson, 2015). Evaluations of these interventions have been promising, with an increase in reporting and arrest rates observed in intervention areas (Bailey, Mace, Powell, & Benson, 2015), and strong support for the program from Indigenous stakeholders (Bailey & Powell, 2016). Consideration of the best ways for the criminal justice system to respond to Indigenous child sexual abuse is crucial in order to improve outcomes for Indigenous children, and to try to break the cycles of abuse.

Whilst there is evidence that there are differences in the progression (or attrition) of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous cases through the criminal justice system (Bailey, Powell, & Brubacher, 2017), what is not known is whether these characteristics are similar across jurisdictions, or whether policing and prosecution differences are apparent for Indigenous children in different jurisdictions. This question is important, as reform in policing in this area has been on the agendas of many jurisdictions.

In the current study, data from two Australian jurisdictions were analysed. Both jurisdictions were very large in size, and sparsely populated. They had a different demographic spread, with Indigenous persons contributing to 3-4% of the population in Jurisdiction A, and approximately 30% of the population in Jurisdiction B (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Jurisdiction A had approximately ten times the population, and a higher proportion being urban,
compared to Jurisdiction B (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). These differences suggest that the exosystems of the jurisdictions may differ (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Both Indigenous peoples, and their exosystems are heterogeneous, and these two jurisdictions have been studied within this context; for instance, where Indigenous representation is large (30%) and small (4%).

The overall aim of the current study was to compare reporting rates and criminal justice responses to cases of child sexual abuse, between two Australian jurisdictions. The first specific aim was to compare reporting rates of cases of child sexual abuse between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and across the jurisdictions. Secondly, the study aimed to compare case characteristics and case tracking, in order to provide context for differences found in reporting rates between groups.

Method

The current study has been conducted in line with the principals of the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012), and within the ethics guidelines as outlined in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2013) report: Researching Right Way: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Ethics: A Domestic and International Review. This analysis has not added to the research burden on Indigenous Australians, as it has used information that had been collected for administrative purposes. Further, it is
strongly hoped that the dissemination of this information will enable a more targeted and effective policy approach.

Procedure

Data collection was approved by the University Human Research Ethics Committee and the research committees associated with the relevant jurisdictions. Data were obtained from a search of the police information management systems of two jurisdictions for all cases of child sexual abuse for the allocated time frames, by setting parameters for date and type of offence, and collating the relevant case identification numbers. Each case was then read in its entirety and the relevant data were extracted for child, offender, and offence variables. All cases were de-identified. Inclusion criteria for both jurisdictions were that the child was between 3 and 16 years of age, and the alleged offender was 10 years or older, at the time of the report.

Participants

The dataset for Jurisdiction A contained all reports of child sexual abuse during 2011. The initial data file held reports of 815 incidents involving 1967 offences, 925 children and 895 offenders; however, 249 incident reports were unusable for this study (30.6%) due to missing data on the child’s Indigenous status. Of the 566 incident reports that remained, 125 (22.1%) cases were from Indigenous children and 441 (77.9%) were from non-Indigenous children. Mean age of all children at the time of the report was 11.3 years ($SD = 3.67$, range = 3 - 16), of whom 80.6% were female. The mean age of the alleged offenders was 32.4 years ($SD = 15.96$, range = 11 - 78). Relationship between child and suspect was allocated into four categories: Immediate family ($n = 122$; 23.1%), Other family member such
as uncle, grandparent, cousin \((n = 54; 10.2\%)\), known associate \((n = 277; 52.4\%)\) and stranger \(76 (n = 76; 14.4\%)\).

The dataset for Jurisdiction B contained all cases of child sexual abuse reported for the five years between mid-2009 and mid-2014. (Because this jurisdiction was significantly smaller in population than Jurisdiction A, five years of data were required to match the sample size). The initial data file held reports of 657 incidents involving 1117 offences, 727 children and 687 offenders. Forty cases \((6.1\%)\) had missing data for child’s Indigenous status and were not included. Of the 617 incident reports that remained, 364 \((59.0\%)\) cases were from Indigenous children and 253 \((41.0\%)\) were from non-Indigenous children. The mean age of all children at the time of the report was 12.2 years \((SD = 3.41, \text{range } = 3 - 16)\), of whom 86.7% were female. The mean age of the alleged offenders was 27.4 years \((SD = 14.3, \text{range } = 10-81)\) years. Relationship between child and suspect categories were: Immediate family \((n = 109; 21.4\%)\), other family member such as uncle, grandparent, cousin \((n = 43; 8.4\%)\), known associate \((n = 116; 52.5\%)\) and stranger \(76 (n = 90; 17.7\%)\).

Further information including a missing data analysis can be found in Bailey, Powell and Brubacher (2017). Case tracking and case characteristics comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases were also published in this paper. In the current paper, case tracking analyses were made across jurisdictions for the Indigenous samples only.

**Variables**

Variables were defined similarly in both datasets. Case characteristics included: severity (penetrative/non-penetrative), delay (case was reported more than, or less than, 12 months after the offence), frequency (single, repeated), and
availability of medical or forensic evidence (yes/no). Case tracking variables included: forensic interview (whether the child attended a video recorded forensic interview or made a written statement), disclosure (whether the child disclosed to police in a forensic interview), and previous disclosure (child had disclosed previously to a family or community member or service provider), whether case was charged (yes/no), and whether case achieved a conviction (yes/no).

**Statistical analysis**

The calculation of reporting rates of child sexual abuse was made using a number of assumptions. Firstly, missing data on Indigenous status were allocated to Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups proportionally, as calculated for each jurisdiction, assuming that the data were missing at random. The data from Jurisdiction B were then divided by five, as this dataset was from a five-year period. Population estimates for Indigenous children were sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics by jurisdiction for 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, 2013). Population estimates for all children by jurisdiction for 2011 were retrieved, and the Indigenous estimates were subtracted to produce estimates of the non-Indigenous population of children. Estimates for 2011 were used for the second jurisdiction as this was the year central to the spread of the dataset, and for which census data were obtainable. Estimates were only available for the 0-14 year age group, so a further assumption was made that this would be a reasonable estimate of the population of the 3-16 year old children contained in the current study. Reporting rates were calculated as the number of reports divided by the group’s population estimate, multiplied by 1000. Case tracking and case characteristics were compared between jurisdictions using chi-square tests. These analyses were only carried out on
the Indigenous samples, as it was here that differences were found between the jurisdictions.

Results

Reporting rates for child sexual abuse by Indigenous status and jurisdiction

Indigenous children accounted for 22.1% of reported cases of child sexual abuse in the dataset from Jurisdiction A in 2011, and 55.8% of reported cases of child sexual abuse in the dataset from Jurisdiction B for the five years between mid-2009 and mid-2014. Numbers of reports were compared over the five years of data collection for Jurisdiction B, and reporting was found to be stable over this time.

Overall reporting rates were slightly higher in Jurisdiction B than Jurisdiction A, as shown in Table 5.1. Rates were similar for the non-Indigenous populations, but for the Indigenous sample, reporting rates were higher in Jurisdiction A than B. Reporting rates of child sexual abuse were higher for Indigenous children than non-Indigenous children in both jurisdictions, with the reporting rate for Indigenous children estimated at approximately four times that of non-Indigenous children in Jurisdiction A, and twice that of non-Indigenous children in Jurisdiction B. In order to investigate patterns in reporting rates between the Indigenous samples of the two jurisdictions in more detail, an analysis comparing case characteristics was conducted on the Indigenous samples of both jurisdictions.
Table 5.1

*Imputation, expected values and reporting rate calculation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous reported cases of child sexual abuse, Jurisdictions A and B*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jurisdiction A (missing = 249)</th>
<th>Jurisdiction B (missing = 40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>non-Indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original totals</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted for J-B as for 5 years(^1)</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imputed totals(^2)</td>
<td>31071</td>
<td>449940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child population estimate(^3)</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Jurisdiction B data were for a five-year period
\(^2\) Missing data are estimated as being at random
\(^3\) Child populations estimates of 0-14 year olds have been used to estimate 3-16 year olds
\(^4\) The reporting rate is the number of incident reports for the child population in 2011 by 1000
Bivariate analysis of case characteristics by jurisdiction

Comparisons of case characteristics of the Indigenous samples by jurisdiction are contained in Table 5.2. The analysis of case severity (penetrative versus non-penetrative) indicated that cases were 15% more likely to be classified as severe in Jurisdiction B, than in Jurisdiction A. Only 4% of cases were delayed for over 12 months in Jurisdiction B compared to 17% in Jurisdiction A. Repeated abuse was marginally more likely to occur in Jurisdiction A. There were no significant differences between jurisdictions regarding whether the alleged perpetrator was a family member or whether there was physical evidence. An independent samples t-test indicated that there were no significant differences between ages of the children across jurisdictions, $t(487) = 0.55, p = .58$.

In order to further investigate differences between jurisdictions for the Indigenous cases, an analysis of case progression was conducted on the Indigenous samples of both jurisdictions. The likelihood of a forensic interview being conducted, charge rates and conviction rates were compared between jurisdictions.

Bivariate analysis of case progression by jurisdiction

Indigenous victims of child sexual abuse were 23% less likely to have a forensic interview in Jurisdiction A, compared to Jurisdiction B, as shown in Table 5.3. If children participated in a forensic interview, they were equally likely to disclose in the forensic interview in both jurisdictions. Children in Jurisdiction A were 12% more likely to have disclosed prior to the forensic interview than in
Table 5.2

Comparison of case characteristics between jurisdictions one and two; numbers, percentages, and chi-square statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jurisdiction A</th>
<th></th>
<th>Jurisdiction B</th>
<th></th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
<th>% diff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># (%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td># (%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity</td>
<td>37 (44.0)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>228 (59.1)</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td>20 (17.4)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>16 (4.1)</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated</td>
<td>29 (33.3)</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>88 (22.3)</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial</td>
<td>39 (39.4)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>104 (37.0)</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical evidence</td>
<td>42 (35.3)</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>108 (29.7)</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

df= 1 for all tests
Table 5.3

*Case tracking between jurisdictions A and B; numbers, percentages, and chi-square statistics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jurisdiction A</th>
<th></th>
<th>Jurisdiction B</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>% diff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forensic interview</strong></td>
<td>58 (46.0)</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>257 (69.3)</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>21.89</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>-23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disclosure in FI</strong></td>
<td>49 (89.1)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>232 (89.2)</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous disclosure</strong></td>
<td>81 (69.8)</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>212 (58.7)</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charged</strong></td>
<td>38 (29.9)</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>162 (43.4)</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>-13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Withdrawn/dismissed</strong></td>
<td>14 (11.0)</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>68 (18.2)</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Convicted</strong></td>
<td>24 (18.9)</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>83 (22.3)</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Convicted if charged</strong></td>
<td>24 (63.2)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>83 (51.6)</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*convicted as a percentage of charged cases

df = 1 for all tests
Jurisdiction B. Reported cases of child sexual abuse were 14% less likely to be charged in Jurisdiction A, compared to Jurisdiction B. Despite this, conviction rates for both jurisdictions were not significantly different. Cases were marginally more likely to be withdrawn or dismissed in Jurisdiction B than in Jurisdiction A. In summary, Indigenous cases were more likely to have a forensic interview conducted, and more likely to be charged in Jurisdiction B than in Jurisdiction A, but there were no significant differences between the jurisdictions in conviction rates.

Discussion

Results from this study suggest that investigating the reporting of child sexual abuse is possible through examining case characteristics and case progression between cultural groups and jurisdictions. By comparing reporting rates across these categories, differences in case characteristics and case progression has enabled a greater understanding of reporting patterns.

Reporting rates of child sexual abuse were higher for Indigenous than non-Indigenous children in both jurisdictions, as has been found in prior research (Guthridge et al., 2012), as well as internationally (Sinha, Trocmé, Fallon, & MacLaurin, 2013). Differences in reporting rates between the two jurisdictions for Indigenous children, however, suggest that either there were fewer cases of child sexual abuse in Jurisdiction B than in Jurisdiction A, or that fewer cases were being reported.

The analysis of Indigenous case characteristics revealed that reported cases were more likely to be severe in Jurisdiction B, than in Jurisdiction A. This result suggested that either child sexual abuse was generally more severe in Jurisdiction B,
or that less severe cases were less likely to be reported in this jurisdiction. If it is assumed that severity rates would be relatively similar between the jurisdictions, the higher severity rates in Jurisdiction B may be a factor in explaining the difference in reporting rates between the Indigenous samples of the two jurisdictions. This finding suggests that under-reporting of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities may be a more significant issue in Jurisdiction B than in Jurisdiction A. Other reasons for these differences could be that adults and children in Jurisdiction A may be more willing or able to report non-penetrative events.

In Jurisdiction B, if a case was not reported within 12 months, the data suggested that it was likely not to be reported at all. Unlike many crimes, sexual abuse is often reported after some considerable time has passed, and sometimes not until the victim has become an adult, if at all (Lippert, Cross, Jones, & Walsh, 2008). In Jurisdiction A, 17% of cases were reported after a twelve-month delay, compared to 4% in Jurisdiction B. This finding of lower reporting of delayed cases in Jurisdiction B also suggests that a culture of non-reporting may be more entrenched in this jurisdiction compared to Jurisdiction A. A culture of higher non-reporting is also suggested by the lower rates of previous disclosure in Jurisdiction B. Reasons for not reporting cases of sexual abuse in Indigenous communities are multi-faceted and nuanced, and may include distrust of the police and welfare agencies, inexperience of personnel working in remote communities, and racism (Lievore, 2003; Willis, 2011).

The analysis of the progression of cases suggested that there were no differences in interview techniques between the jurisdictions, as the rate of disclosure in a forensic interview was similar in both jurisdictions. (Anecdotally, it was known
that interviewer training was consistent across both jurisdictions.) There were significant differences, however, in the percentage of cases where a forensic interview was conducted. Cases in Jurisdiction B were significantly more likely to have a forensic interview, and to be charged, than in Jurisdiction A. Despite this, there were no significant differences between the conviction rates for Indigenous cases between the jurisdictions.

Whilst it is possible that there were differences in how judgements were made by police in the two jurisdictions regarding whether to proceed with a forensic interview, a more plausible explanation for differences in the forensic interview rate between the two jurisdictions may be the effect of the higher severity of the reported cases (as measured by whether the case was penetrative) in Jurisdiction B. Generally speaking, more severe cases could be expected to be more likely to proceed to a forensic interview, and more likely to be charged, than less severe cases (Cossins, 2010). If the higher interview rates in Jurisdiction B were due to severity of cases, then a further question is posed: why were cases not also convicted at a higher rate in this jurisdiction? Cases were 23% more likely to have a forensic interview, 14% more likely to be charged, but only 3% more likely (non-significantly) to be convicted in Jurisdiction B compared to Jurisdiction A. If the higher rates of forensic interview in Jurisdiction B were due to higher severity of cases, then the lower rates of conviction need to be better understood. Factors such as the quality of legal counsel, and pressures (including violence) from community members, may impede cases going forward (Cossins, 2010). The used of plea bargains (reducing sexual abuse charges to lesser or other charges to obtain a conviction) may also affect outcomes. Further, there may have been differences between the two jurisdictions in
awareness of options for reporting, different attitudes to reporting and differences in who is mandated to make a report.

Although there were marginally more withdrawals and dismissals in Jurisdiction B than in Jurisdiction A, it is not clear from the data whether this effect was because more cases with insufficient evidence were charged, or whether these cases were withdrawn by the victim or the victim’s family or other events.

Proceeding through the criminal justice system is highly stressful for children who have been victims of child sexual abuse (Bradley & Wood, 1996; Cossins, 2010; Eastwood, Kift, & Grace, 2006; Hershkowitz, Horowitz, & Lamb, 2007; Shead, 2014). Fear of reporting is often exacerbated for Indigenous children, particularly when the offender is a family member, or a high status community member (Bailey et al., 2015; Funston, 2013; Wild & Anderson, 2007). Indigenous children and their families may have a genuine fear of reprisal that may cause them to consider withdrawing the case.

Recantation has been found in the general population to be more likely in younger children, children whose abuser was a parent figure, and children who lacked the support of the non-offending caregiver (known as the filial dependency model of recantation) (Malloy, Lyon, & Quas, 2007). In the current sample, there were no differences between jurisdictions for the child’s age or for whether the abuser was a family member; the level of support proffered by the non-offending caregivers was not known. Given that Indigenous groups are not homogenous, caregivers and community members may be more supportive of reporting abuse and proceeding a case through the criminal justice system in Jurisdiction A than Jurisdiction B.
The main limitation of this study was the missing data on Indigenous status, particularly in the first jurisdiction. In order to calculate reporting rate estimates, these data were imputed using the assumption of the data being missing at random (imputation was not used for the rest of the analyses). The use of imputation here brings with it the potential for misclassification of ethnic group, and this was more likely for Jurisdiction A. The collection of data on Indigenous status relies on opportunities for people to identify as Indigenous, and on their willingness to do so (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011). The Commissioner for Children and Young People (2015) noted that Indigenous status was an important variable in most administrative datasets, but that it was an area where inadequate information was often obtained.

A further limitation to this study was that there was no information in the datasets regarding plea bargaining, and the authors were unable to determine what effect this may have had on conviction outcomes. Whilst plea bargaining (or plea negotiation) does have a place in Australian criminal proceedings, no external data is currently reported on this aspect of the law (Flynn & Fitz-Gibbon, 2011). (Plea bargaining may be defined as an agreement between the prosecutor and defendant in which the defendant pleads guilty to a lesser charge in return for a more lenient sentence, or the dropping of some of the charges.)

In conclusion, this study found that reporting rates of child sexual abuse were different across cultural groups and across jurisdictions. Indigenous children had higher reporting rates than non-Indigenous children in both jurisdictions. The lower rate of reporting of Indigenous cases in the second jurisdiction, compared to the first, may have been caused by a stronger disinclination to report cases, rather than actual
lower rates of child sexual abuse. This conclusion was formed due to differences in severity and case progression between the Indigenous samples of the two jurisdictions. Reporting rates of child sexual abuse are better understood when further information, such as case characteristics and case progression information, is available.
CHAPTER SIX: OVERVIEW OF OPERATION RESET

This chapter introduces the second phase of the thesis. In the first phase, information on reporting, case attrition and the collection of child evidence presented a context for understanding child sexual abuse in the Indigenous communities of two jurisdictions. This phase suggested that there may be added challenges for Indigenous children in accessing the criminal justice system.

The second phase of this thesis investigates whether it is possible to ameliorate some of these challenges and to better address issues of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities. The vehicle for this investigation was an evaluation of Operation RESET, a community engagement strategy that aimed to address child sexual abuse in remote communities in Western Australia.

Chapter six presents an overview of this initiative. It begins by stating the rationale behind the creation of the operation, including a brief overview of the evaluations of two previous Australian interventions (that are publically available), in the Northern Territory and New South Wales. The core principles underpinning the development of Operation RESET are then discussed, followed by an overview of the operation’s seven phases of implementation, including the employment of an exit strategy. Finally, a brief summary of the outcomes of the evaluations of the operation that were completed prior to the current project are presented.

Prior attempts to address child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities

Child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities has been a multifaceted and complex problem that has remained an ongoing concern despite numerous
government inquires and reforms that have been conducted over the past few decades (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011; Berlyn et al., 2011; Bromfield & Holzer, 2008; Calma, 2006; Mulligan, 2008; NSW Ombudsman, n.d.; Stanley et al., 2003; Wild & Anderson, 2007). Previous interventions have had limited success in addressing child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities. Two of these interventions, the Northern Territory Emergency Response and Safe Families, will now be discussed.

The publication of the 2007 report “Little Children are Sacred” (Wild & Anderson, 2007) that looked into the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse was one of the main triggers of an intervention by the Australian Government in the Northern Territory, known as the Northern Territory Emergency Response (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2012). This report described the extent of the abuse in Indigenous communities, that this abuse needed to be clearly acknowledged, and that there was an imperative to act in order to break the cycles of abuse and inter-generational reoffending. It stated that child sexual abuse was no more acceptable in Aboriginal culture than it was in mainstream society, but that Indigenous communities have experienced pressures that were unlike those of the mainstream population. These pressures include substance abuse, and a number of socio-economic factors, both urban and rural, which have led to high levels of violence and abuse in Indigenous communities.

The aim of the Northern Territory Emergency Response was to make communities safe and to protect children. Health checks for children and other administrative measures were implemented, followed by changes in legislation that explicitly suspended the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, and
removed the anti-discrimination law in the Northern Territory for the duration of the intervention. In attempting to address issues of child sexual abuse, the government mobilised the armed forces, initiated an offensive on law and order issues in Indigenous communities, and forcefully acquired Indigenous townships on five year leases. The issue of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities was described by the government as being a national emergency (Fawcett & Hanlon, 2009). The Northern Territory Emergency Response contained a series of measures that were in effect at different times during the first 12 months of the period, and were under examination by the review board (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2012). Some of these measures will now be briefly reviewed.

Income management by the government was one of the key tenants of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, with over 13,300 people living in 53 communities and 46 town camps subject to the scheme. The intention of the scheme was to direct income towards the provision of better services for children, such as food and provisions for the home, rather than for items such as cigarettes, alcohol, or money for gambling. This scheme was able to be implemented due to the suspension of the racial discrimination act. Users of the scheme were not consulted about, nor did they consent to the income management scheme, before or during its implementation. Negotiation about inclusion in the scheme was not permitted. Participants were determined solely by whether they lived in a prescribed area. The scheme was highly complex and involved changing procedures that were in many cases implemented without information or explanation. Difficulties associated with using this scheme caused many Indigenous people frustration, humiliation and
embarrassment, as well as an experience of overt racism (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2012).

Despite the problems associated with the implementation of the income management scheme, there were some significant benefits for some users, particularly women and pensioners. Some individuals felt that they were able to manage their incomes better and buy higher quality food. Others had been able to save up to buy white goods, which they had been unable to do prior to the introduction of the scheme. The general consensus in communities was that the scheme should be made voluntary unless the recipient had demonstrated that they were not meeting their family or community responsibilities. The review board recommended that the application of compulsory income management across the board should cease, with compulsory income management only being applied on the basis of issues of child protection, school attendance, and pertinent behavioural triggers.

Another measure introduced during the intervention was that an additional 18 temporary police stations in remote communities were added to the 38 stations already in operation. On the whole, the increased police presence was welcomed by communities, who felt that it had improved their safety; however, better training in areas of cultural competency were required. Some police stated that they felt unprepared for the deployment, and some communities stated that there was insufficient understanding from police about their communities and ways.

In terms of the response to issues of child sexual abuse raised during the review, there appeared to be no increase in confidence by community members that reports of child sexual abuse would be better attended to after the implementation of
the Northern Territory Emergency Response. Low reporting of the crime remained the norm, and remained more significant in the Northern Territory than in other jurisdictions for Indigenous people (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2012; Pocock, 2003). The review board noted that there was considerable desire, in almost every community consultation they conducted, to deal with issues of child abuse and neglect. In many communities, courageous efforts were being made to deal with these issues.

The review board also noted that there were high rates of developmental trauma experienced by children in communities where there was regular violence and alcohol abuse. In these environments, children’s behaviour could become dysregulated, and they were incapable of managing normal emotions, particularly the emotions of anger and fear. These behavioural issues were likely to have also been the experience of their parents, and the trauma had been compounded over generations. The board recommended a better engagement from the government with communities, to strengthen child protection arrangements, and to deal better with reported cases of child sexual abuse. The board also recommended the implementation of a comprehensive strategy for youth development services.

The Northern Territory Emergency Response has been described as invasive and non-participatory. Using the justification that it aimed to protect Indigenous children from sexual abuse, it viewed Indigenous peoples in negative, homogenising, and pathological ways (Fawcett & Hanlon, 2009). The Northern Territory Emergency Response Review board concluded that the emotional response to the Little Children Are Sacred report, which sparked the government’s intervention program, damaged the ability of the Intervention to achieve its goals. These goals
would take time to achieve and it was important that there was a commitment to resourcing necessary services over the long term. One of the main outcomes from the review of the Intervention was that changes could not be imposed on communities, and that the challenge for Indigenous people was to grow this change from within communities. The challenge for governments was to genuinely and respectfully invite the active participation of Indigenous communities, so that they could determine their own futures.

Whilst this intervention has been extensively assessed, a program that aimed to address child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in New South Wales was also found to have mixed results, in an evaluation that struggled to find definitive quantitative data (Henry et al., 2013). The Safe Families initiative was a $22.9 million flagship program that aimed to reduce child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in New South Wales, which has the largest Indigenous population in Australia. Stage one of the evaluation revealed that timelines had been unrealistic, there was limited ownership of the program by the community, failure to create a new culture, confusion regarding the role of the lead agency and a lack of data available for evaluative analysis (Henry et al., 2013). The final evaluation found little evidence of the impact of the program over the two and a half years of its implementation. The program reflected the broader problems that are involved when the service system is hampered by poor planning and piecemeal initiatives, alongside insufficient accountability arrangements (New South Wales Ombudsman, 2011).

The accounts from the evaluations of both these interventions suggest that reform in service delivery models was urgently needed to effectively address the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous peoples across Australia, and address the
issue of child sexual abuse, particularly in remote communities. New approaches that encompass the need for community engagement and whole of government approaches were now required (Thompson et al., 2008).

The development of Operation RESET

The development of Operation RESET was driven by anecdotal knowledge of a high prevalence of child sexual abuse in parts of remote Western Australia, but low reporting rates from victims and low detection by law enforcement officers. These communities had a broad range of risk factors known to be associated with child sexual abuse and family violence, such as poor health and housing, and substance and pornography abuse, high numbers of teenage pregnancies, high rates of sexually transmitted diseases in children, and self-harm (Mace & Powell, 2012).

The primary aim of the initiative was for communities and supporting systems to be better able to detect, respond to and prevent child sexual abuse. This aim was to be achieved through the implementation of a new model of working with communities. The operation used a proactive, community engagement model to build knowledge about the law, increase collaboration and efficiency of the government support agencies, and to have a cross-sector commitment to the protection of children. This model integrated response to victims, capacity building and educational strategies within this community engagement model.
Core principles behind the development of Operation RESET

There were four core principles that underpinned the development of Operation RESET: Community engagement, acknowledgment of the underlying causes and context of child sexual abuse, capacity building and a whole-of-government approach. These will now be briefly discussed.

Community engagement

The first core principle at the foundation of Operation RESET was that tackling child sexual abuse requires a proactive, collaborative approach between community and government. Ideally, this collaboration involves engagement with the whole of the community, not just the child, and includes the active participation of all stakeholders. This collaborative partnership aims to ensure that projects are culturally appropriate by utilising the community’s expertise and resources. Collaboration would ensure that the communities’ needs were well targeted and could be maintained over the long term. Genuine partnership also aims to engender trust between Indigenous community members and service providers. Trust is fundamental to collaboration, and is also central to the disclosure of sexual abuse (Powell & Cauchi, 2013). Trust is also vitally important in Indigenous communities where adverse treatment by authorities, which includes the forced removal of children, has been experienced by families over generations (Cassidy, 2006; Hunter, 2008; Keel, 2004; Mulligan, 2008). Community engagement was at the centre of the strategies the operation used to work with Indigenous communities.
Acknowledgment of the underlying causes and context of child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities is a multifaceted issue that relates to many other concerns such as health and welfare, housing, education and employment (Calma, 2006). Therefore, it is only by taking an ecological or holistic approach that the interconnected aspects of the community and the individual can be addressed. This approach is preferable to taking a linear approach that focusses on individual actions towards children (Fawcett & Hanlon, 2009; Gordon et al., 2002). There are significant historical issues, such as the loss of cultural identity, unresolved grief and trauma, and the breakdown of community and family structures that need to be addressed. Therefore, programs must be included that can address these issues, as well as addressing basic needs for health and housing.

Capacity Building

The third principle pertains to the provision of services that strengthen and empower families and communities, in order to enhance children’s general safety and wellbeing. This approach to community engagement aims to foster independence, and specifically aims to develop skills and areas of competence (Garlick, 1999). Strategies to build capacity may include professional development, training, and community engagement processes that aim to address identified needs in communities. These processes were considered by the RESET team to be essential in improving outcomes for children who had been sexually abused.
Whole-of-government approach

Building capacity relies on the delivery of a whole of government response to crimes of child sexual abuse. The continuing disadvantage experienced by Indigenous peoples is not necessarily a reflection of a lack of government resources, but rather that these resources have demonstrated a poor return in terms of outcomes (New South Wales Ombudsman, 2011). Often this poor return is due to inadequate communication within and between government departments, and in many instances the low uptake of service by Indigenous peoples may be attributed to a disjointed and poorly targeted approach by governments, despite the best intentions of, and good work done by, individual agencies. Whole-of-government organization has been a major challenge in Indigenous communities, with program delivery in many instances lacking coordination, particularly in remote locations. Communication between service delivery agencies is often lacking, even when interests and responsibilities of the agencies are aligned (Department of Finance and Deregulation, 2010). Improving communication between service agencies in the RESET intervention areas was a significant focus of the team, along with empowering community members to understand where services may be of assistance to them, and to be empowered to use the services that were available.

Operation RESET aimed to coordinate a range of stakeholders to identify and deliver solutions to address child sexual abuse and related issues. Whilst the Operation was a joint initiative of the Western Australian Police’s Sex Crimes Division and the Department for Child Protection’s ChildFIRST service, other departments including Health and Education were required to share responsibility in responding to child abuse, through consultation, inclusion and the provision of
resources. The Operation worked under the principle that there was no one solution, but that strategies needed to be tailored to individual community needs and concerns. The operation aimed to ensure that children, families and communities felt supported and safe after disclosing sexual abuse, and throughout their contact with the criminal justice process (Mace & Powell, 2012).

**Stages of implementation of Operation RESET**

The following section will give a brief overview of the seven stages of implementation of Operation RESET.

**Stage 1: Selecting intervention areas**

The first stage involved deciding where to conduct the initial trial of the Operation. This decision was made on the basis of interagency intelligence for all Indigenous communities across the state, combined with community demography factors. This information was facilitated by using the ‘Survey of Risk Factors for Child Abuse in Region/Remote Communities’, developed by the Western Australian Police and the Department for Child Protection. The survey elicited information about the overall risk factors for child sexual abuse, and scores were combined to produce a rating for each community. Communities were chosen on the basis of high risk factors for child sexual abuse, but low reporting rates.

**Stage 2: Establishing the team**

Once the communities were selected, the next task was to establish a core implementation team. This team consisted of seven professionals, including a senior
detective sergeant, specialist child abuse detective investigators from the Sex Crime Division’s Child Abuse Squad, and Specialist Forensic Child Interviewers attached to the Department for Child Protection ChildFIRST service and the Police Child Assessment Interview Team. The team’s function was to address under-reporting of child sexual abuse using the following methods: 1) coordination through network and stakeholder management, 2) supporting the delivery of a proactive, targeted response, 3) being a visible presence in the communities and, 4) working alongside other service providers to build relationships and capacity, and to build trust and rapport with community.

Team members were selected on the basis of their specialist knowledge of the investigation of child sexual abuse, as well as for personal characteristics such as good listening skills and a positive previous experience with working in remote communities. Importantly, specialist Indigenous child interviewers who spoke the local languages and understood the culture and traditions of these communities were included in the team.

There were three important reasons why a team was compiled external to the service providers that were already in the area: 1) This ensured the specialist expertise of those involved in overseeing the program; 2) the team would provide a non-permanent presence in communities during visits, so as to demonstrate genuine commitment and partnership, promoting the new system and gathering information; 3) the existing service providers had pre-existing heavy workloads of their own, whereas the independent team could devote themselves full-time to the program.
Stage 3: Community consultation

Consultation with community members and service providers was conducted through a series of formal and informal meetings and consultations with a broad range of community members and interagency representatives. Professional knowledge was articulated by RESET team members, and information flowed in both directions. Through the process of these interactions, it became clear that the outcomes of the project were not limited to the apprehension of offenders and substantiation of offences, but needed to be measured in terms of community safety and understanding of the indicators of child sexual abuse in the communities by both community members and professionals. This communication stage was ongoing throughout the implementation of the operation, with information flowing between the strategic and operational levels, and community members.

Stage 4: Action stage

The action stage of the operation referred to the administration and implementation of cross-government actions during the deployment stages. These stages were planned well in advance, and were highly structured in order to ensure that the team could work to full capacity on appropriate tasks during the time spent in communities. Activities conducted by the RESET team were either proactive or reactive. Proactive deployment phases were usually over a five day period, and included five or six investigators and two specialist child interviewers. Typically a proactive deployment would include between eight and nineteen investigations as well as capacity building assignments and rapport building. A reactive deployment
was conducted as required, often for an arrest or in response to a report, and was usually conducted by two investigators and two specialist child interviewers.

The RESET team conducted around 330 meetings during the 2009-2010 deployment with a range of community members and service providers such as police, education department, health department, shire workers, justice department, community health agencies, victim support services, counselling services, corrective services, and welfare services. Most reports were made during, or soon after the team visited the communities (Bailey, Mace, Powell, et al., 2015).

**Stage 5: Monitoring**

The activities of the operation were recorded throughout the operation’s implementation, using a visual display of the duration and frequency of tasks over time. This documentation aided in planning and scheduling, and was intended to be of use in future evaluations. It was also used to inform the strategic direction of the project, to ensure equitable distribution of resources over the intervention areas and throughout the operation period.

**Stage 6: Evaluation**

Quality control was used to maintain standards of service delivery by comparing output to success indicators. This was seen to be an important component of the operation in order to fulfil its service obligations. Evaluation of the operation was to be staged in two parts. Firstly, evaluation took place on a daily basis through the exchange of information between community members, service providers and the team. Ongoing anecdotal information allowed the team to prioritize activities and
ensured that communities were actively participating in the intervention. For instance, a community member revealed that there was insufficient understanding regarding the age of consent. In response to this information, the team worked with the local women’s groups to produce material that could inform about law and consent. This material was created, produced and owned by the women’s groups. The second part of evaluation was a formal program evaluation of the operation, and is described in detail in the following section of this chapter.

**Stage 7: Exit strategy**

The final stage of the operation implementation was initiating the exit strategy that had been built in to the planning of the initiative. The aim of the exit strategy was to enable successful initiatives arising from the deployment of Operation RESET to be adopted by local agencies and maintained over the long term. Because of the large number of Indigenous communities in Western Australia, and the costs involved with implementing the program, Operation RESET could only be maintained on a temporary basis. It was important that the good work of the specialist team be continued by locally run forms of the operation at the end of the eighteen-month program. In essence, the exit strategy aimed to have local service providers assume responsibility for this work.
One of the significant strengths of this initiative was the planned evaluation process that had been built into the project from the outset. This strategy was published along with the rationale and implementation plan for the project (Mace & Powell, 2012). The planned evaluation involved three main aspects: 1) Interviews with stakeholders, 2) Construction of a scale to measure attitudes to child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities and 3) Comprehensive data collection of day-to-day activities of Operation RESET at the first site (Mid-West Gascoyne Region). The first two of these planned evaluations have been published, and will now be briefly discussed.

**Qualitative Study**

The first published evaluation of Operation RESET utilised a qualitative analysis methodology to examine stakeholders’ perceptions of the strategic model (Mace, Powell, & Benson, 2015). In-depth interviews were collected from community members, victims’ families and professionals who provided services across the region, who had experience of Operation RESET. The analysis attempted to determine whether there was improved service delivery in relation to the detection, response and prevention of child sexual abuse, and improved relationships between Indigenous community members and government agencies. Because prior research in this field was limited and this initiative signaled a significantly new approach, the detailed and non-directive nature of a qualitative study was deemed to be appropriate for this first level of analysis. This initial review determined that there were four distinctive features that could be attributed to the success of the reform. These
features included 1) a proactive outreach by the team in terms of specialized services, 2) capacity building with a focus on improved skills, capabilities, understanding and abilities of both professionals and communities, 3) an holistic focus of integrated service provision and 4) genuine engagement based on relationships that facilitated trust. The review concluded that Operation RESET had been a major step forward in improving relationships between Indigenous community members and human services agencies, and had considerably assisted in maximizing justice outcomes and children’s wellbeing.

Scale to measure attitudes to child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities.

The second published evaluation of the initiative was a validation study of a scale that was designed to measure attitudes to child sexual abuse in remote Australian Indigenous Communities (Bailey, Mace, & Powell, 2015). This scale was developed as part of the planned evaluation of Operation RESET, in order to measure attitudes, and the effects of the initiative in the regions. Principle components analysis revealed an intuitive four-factor structure from an abridged version of the scale: entrenched issues, personal understanding and knowledge, communication between community and government, and community action (N=120, Ten-items in abridged scale.)

In order to investigate the integrity of the scale, comparisons between groups were made for service providers verses community members, and Indigenous versus non-Indigenous persons. Service providers living outside the community accounted for 58%, community members living within the community accounted for 9%, and
service providers who were also community members accounted for 33% of the sample. Eighteen percent of participants identified as Indigenous. Participants who were both service providers and community members felt that entrenched issues (fear of talking about child sexual abuse, shame, and time for cases to reach court) were a greater problem than did service providers who did not live in the community.

Community members were found to be significantly more likely to believe that reports of child sexual abuse were not taken seriously by police and welfare than service providers. Indigenous participants were more likely to believe that communication was poor between community and government, and that reports of child sexual abuse were not taken seriously by police and welfare. Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine the effect of Operation RESET on outcomes as only a small amount of data had been collected prior to the operation, and what data was collected was not matched pre and post.

The third stage of the evaluation process was intended to be a study based on the information collected by the team leader of the first RESET site. This information, however, was not sufficient to effectively conduct a quantitative evaluation of the initiative. A new strategy to measure quantitative outcomes was devised, and is presented here as Study 4 of this thesis.

**Summary**

The published evaluations of Operation RESET suggested that the initiative offered a new type of service delivery that was quite different from what had been offered previously to address child sexual abuse in Australia. Central features of this initiative were the establishment of genuine collaboration between the operation
team, community members and local stakeholders, proactive delivery of services, capacity building, and integrated service delivery (whole of government approach). The initiative aimed to provide a process whereby stakeholders could come together to determine strengths and issues, work out solutions, and develop a holistic plan for their region or community. Reports of sexual abuse would be investigated quickly and comprehensively by police and child protection officers, and Indigenous communities would work in collaboration with service providers in preventing and reporting the sexual abuse of children in their communities.
CHAPTER SEVEN: QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION OF OPERATION RESET (Study 4)

Chapter seven presents the fourth empirical study in this thesis, a quantitative evaluation of Operation RESET using police administrative data. Whilst previous evaluations were strongly positive, direct measures of success were required to effectively evaluate the outcomes of the Operation. This study builds on previous evaluations of the initiative by presenting quantitative data on reports and arrests in intervention versus non-intervention areas across the entire jurisdiction.

This paper was published in *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*. This journal has specific guidelines for structure, formatting and referencing, and this paper was prepared in accordance with these guidelines.
Evaluation of a Collaborative Operation to Improve Child Sexual Abuse Reporting in Western Australian Indigenous Communities

Cate Bailey¹, Glenn Mace², Martine Powell¹, & Mairi Benson¹

¹: School of Psychology, Deakin University; ²: Western Australia Department for Child Protection & Family Support

Author notes: Thanks to Detective Senior Sergeant Bradley Burnett, Senior Investigating Officer for Operation RESET, to Bronwen Manger, for supplementary data analysis and editorial assistance and to Lucy Busija for statistical advice. Any correspondence should be addressed to Professor Martine Powell, School of Psychology, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Hwy, Burwood, 3125, Australia.
Email: martine.powell@deakin.edu.au
Abstract

This study presents an evaluation of Operation RESET, a community engagement intervention designed to help remote Indigenous communities and human services agencies to uncover, respond to and prevent child sexual abuse. The primary aim of this evaluation was to determine whether the intervention was associated with increased reporting. Data were obtained for six Western Australian regions between 2007 and 2012. Numbers of reports and arrests significantly increased in the intervention areas during the intervention compared to the pre-intervention time-period, but not in the control areas. Arrest rates significantly increased during the intervention, and increased further following the intervention. There were no changes in arrest rates in regions that did not participate in the operation. This evidence suggests that the reforms showed a marked improvement in some key outcomes for Indigenous victims of child sexual abuse, and supports the adoption of this collaborative approach by other jurisdictions.

Keywords: Child Sexual Abuse, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Remote, Community Engagement Initiative, Intervention
Incidences of substantiated harm, or risk of harm, to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are estimated at between five and eight times that of non-Indigenous children, despite lower rates of reporting and convictions (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011; Bromfield & Holzer, 2008; Stanley, Tomison, & Pocock, 2003). The prevalence of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities has been the subject of numerous government enquiries (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Berlyn, Bromfield, & Lamont, 2011; Mullighan, 2008; NSW Ombudsman, 2012) and media attention, especially during the Northern Territory Emergency Response (Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board, 2008). Nonetheless, quantitative evaluation outcomes have been lacking in child protection systems across the globe, constraining the ability of researchers to provide conclusive answers about the impact of certain procedures and constraining service providers’ ability to make evidence-based decisions about policy and procedure (Snell, 2003). Absence of good evaluation data related to the management of child abuse cases has made it difficult for service providers to evaluate outcomes and has provided governments little return on the investments they have made in financing reforms (NSW Ombudsman, 2012).

One of the chief issues with collecting information and data in the area of child sexual abuse is that of under-reporting. Calma (2006) referred to this as the code of silence that exists in a many Indigenous communities. Although under-reporting of this crime type is a universal problem, there are a range of factors that further exacerbate the problem for Indigenous people. Some of the barriers to reporting these crimes include an inadequate understanding by community members of the nature of the crime and the laws that relate to it, as well as systemic barriers,
such as shame and fear of reprisal, that make it difficult for Indigenous people to engage with authorities (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Lievore, 2003; Stanley et al., 2003). Community engagement and the combined response of the relevant governmental departments working together is required to address the complex and multifaceted nature of this problem (Thompson, Greville, & Param, 2008) and tackle the “unresolved grief associated with multiple layers of trauma that has spanned many generations” (Stanley et al., 2003, p. 7).

The current study presents an evaluation of Operation RESET, a community engagement initiative aimed at facilitating remote Indigenous communities and human service agencies to uncover, respond to and prevent incidences of child sexual abuse. This trial strategy was a joint initiative of the Western Australian Police Sex Crime Division and the Department for Child Protection and Family Support’s ChildFIRST service, and operated in thirteen remote towns and communities in the Mid-West Gascoyne and two in the Pilbara regions of Western Australia (WA). The proactive, collective impact approach between government, non-government organizations and communities aimed to empower families and communities to improve the overall safety and wellbeing of children, as well as acknowledge the underlying causes and contexts of child sexual abuse. This approach supports the model advocated by Calma (2006) for a proactive system aimed at building and supporting healthy communities, rather than a passive reaction supporting a dysfunctional system.

Operation RESET delivered a different type of service to what had previously been offered throughout Australia, and had a number of distinctive features. These included the establishment of genuine consultation between the operation team, local
stakeholders and community members, proactive service delivery through capacity building, and a strong emphasis on self-determination. The model was created to provide a tangible process through which the different stakeholders could come together to identify strengths and problems, design collective solutions and craft a unified plan for the region or community. The intentions underlying the intervention were that Indigenous communities themselves would effectively prevent the sexual abuse of their children (with the support of service providers) and that complaints made to the police and child protection service providers would be investigated thoroughly and expeditiously.

Children in Indigenous families are generally more likely to experience the multiple types of disadvantage that are associated with alcohol and substance abuse, family violence, poverty, mental health issues, and adults with histories of neglect or abuse (Calma, 2006; Wild & Anderson, 2007) than non-Indigenous children. Areas selected for Operation RESET had reported crimes symptomatic of these types of disadvantage. Consultation with stakeholder groups indicated, anecdotally, that the number of child sexual abuse reports were not representative of the day to day experience of Indigenous people living and working in these communities (Mace & Powell, 2012). Following the selection of the intervention areas, a core team for the project was assembled which included a senior investigation officer, detective sergeant, four specialist child abuse detective investigators from the Sex Crime Division’s Child Abuse Squad, and Specialist Forensic Child Interviewers attached to the Department for Child Protection’s ChildFIRST service and the Police Child Assessment Interview Team. Once the operation team was established, extensive consultation with community members and a wide range of local service providers
was conducted in order to share information about child sexual abuse, and then collectively devise solutions for application.

The action phase of the intervention involved implementing the community engagement strategy. The RESET team were engaged in proactive, pre-planned visits in which they took part in activities designed to build rapport and capacity as well as conducting investigations. Activities included raising awareness of child abuse by sharing information, providing training to school staff and families on protective behaviors and abuse indicators, increasing support to victims after arrests, connecting victims and families to local support services, building rapport between service providers and children in the classroom, and attending sporting activities. Reactive visits to investigate specific incident reports were also undertaken, and were assigned according to priority and available resources. Documentation was carried out throughout this phase to provide a framework for planning and informing the strategic and equitable distribution of services. Further, the operation had an exit strategy built into the project to enable successful initiatives to be adopted by local agencies and maintained in the long term. Costs incurred by Operation RESET were funded separately from normal business and resources were not diverted from other areas of WA to fund the Operation. For a more thorough description of the intervention, please refer to Mace and Powell (2012).

The current study is the second evaluation of the effectiveness of Operation RESET in improving child sexual abuse outcomes. The previous evaluation used a qualitative analysis method to examine stakeholders’ perceptions of the strategic model (Mace, Powell, & Benson, 2015). In-depth interviews were collected from community members, victims’ families and professionals who provided services
across the region, including those involved in the delivery of Operation RESET. The analysis attempted to determine whether there were improved relationships between Indigenous community members and government agencies, and improved service delivery in relation to the detection, response and prevention of child sexual abuse. Because prior research in this field is limited and this initiative signaled a significantly new approach, the detailed and non-directive nature of a qualitative study was deemed to be appropriate for this first level of analysis. This initial review determined that there were four distinctive features that could be attributed to the success of the reform. These included (1) proactive outreach (i.e., the model brought specialized services to the people), (2) capacity building (i.e., the model improved skills, competencies, knowledge and abilities of professionals and communities), (3) brokering both holistic and integrated service provision and (4) genuine engagement based on trust. The review concluded that Operation RESET had been a major step forward in improving relationships between Indigenous community members and human services agencies, and had considerably assisted in maximizing justice outcomes and victims’ wellbeing.

Increasing reporting rates was one of the primary aims of the intervention, and therefore the overall aim of the current paper was to test whether the new model of intervention was associated with actual increases in reports and arrests in the areas where Operation RESET was conducted. The first specific aim was to determine whether reports of child sexual abuse had increased in intervention areas compared to regions without the intervention. Secondly, the study aimed to investigate any corresponding increases in arrests in intervention areas compared to non-intervention areas. Finally, for the intervention to be deemed successful in the longer term, the
arrest rate (rate of arrest per incident report) would need to increase during Operation
RESET, and be maintained or increased further following the intervention. Increases
in arrest rates would not be apparent in the regions that did not participate in the
operation.

Method

Sample

Analyses in this study were divided into two sections. The first section used
data collected during the operation in the Mid-West Gascoyne, and the second
section used data collected from the WA police Information Management System.

Operation Data. The sample for the first section of the evaluation consisted
of all cases of child sexual abuse that were reported in the Mid-West Gascoyne
region and referred to the Operation RESET team and included information on
reports, investigations conducted, victim interviews and arrests. Information that
tracked the team’s day to day activities was also collected. This information included
data on which community was attended by team members, the services they
interacted with, schools visited, participation in sports days and sausage barbecues
and the type of training that was delivered and to whom. Activities were defined as
‘proactive’ when the team entered and engaged with the community and ‘reactive’
when the team responded to an incident report. Proactive days were characterized by
the team conducting meetings with local organizations, training, participating in
social events, and managing investigations. Table 7.1 contains a breakdown of
proactive and reactive presence by community. The table also outlines the significant
amount of proactive activity conducted as part of this operation, with over 88% of
the team’s days spent in proactive engagement. Only four communities received reactive visits, indicating that the intervention activities were mostly conducted during proactive visits. In the non-intervention regions, all interactions would be described as reactive visits.

During Operation RESET, there were 45 training sessions presented by the RESET team; these covered mandatory reporting, criminal law, Australian National Child Offender Register, protective behaviors, signs and indicators of child abuse, and how to deal with district intelligence (now incorporated in the Crime Intelligence Coordination Unit). Additionally, three days of Child Assessment Interview Training (Forensic) was delivered in Carnarvon along with Specialist Child Interview Training, specifically for staff in the Mid-West Gascoyne region. A total of 330 meetings were conducted by the Operation RESET team with local organizations and communities during this 18-month time period, and are presented by organization in Table 7.2. Local police, the Education Department, Indigenous communities and Department for Child Protection and Family Support make up the majority of the meetings (63%). Information from qualitative interviews (Mace et al., 2015) indicated that the meetings were well attended.
Table 7.1

*Operation RESET Team Proactive and Reactive Days by Community*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Proactive</th>
<th>Reactive</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burringurrah</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnarvon</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cue</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gascoyne Junction</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldton</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karralundi</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meekatharra</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt Magnet</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullewa</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pia Wadjari</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yalgoo</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yulga Jinna</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>181</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>205</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7.2

*Meetings Conducted by Operation RESET team by Organization*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Meetings</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cuml. %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Department</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous community</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPFS</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health department</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>80.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community health agencies</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim support services</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>89.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling services</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>95.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrective services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>97.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local training</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>99.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCP and Police combined session</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>99.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety Alliance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>99.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>330</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data from WA Police Information Management System. Number of reports of arrests made in six WA regions were obtained from the WA Police Incident Management System between 2007 and 2012. Two of these regions, the Mid-West Gascoyne and the Pilbara, received interventions in selected areas. The two main towns in Mid-West Gascoyne (Geraldton and Carnarvon) also referred cases to the RESET team, and have therefore been included as being within the intervention area. Overall, around 90% of the Indigenous population of the Mid-West Gascoyne was within the targeted area. The intervention in the Pilbara was on a smaller scale; the two targeted towns accounted for around 11% of the total Indigenous population across the region.

The remaining four regions where data were collated (Goldfields, Great Southern, Wheatbelt and South-west) were selected to act as controls and will hence be referred to as non-intervention areas. The Kimberley was excluded from the sample due to there being a different type of intervention in place early in this time period. The Goldfields region had received a small RESET intervention in a remote town with a small population at a similar time period to the Mid-West Gascoyne. However, the data retrieved from the Incident Management System for the intervention towns were too small to analyze, and the region was therefore retained as a non-intervention region. To test for any bias from including the Goldfields data in the current study, analyses were repeated without this data; no differences in the results were found. There were no observed differences between intervention and non-intervention areas that could be considered to be confounding factors.
Procedure

**Protocol for data collection.** The evaluation design was approved by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee, steering groups and committees from within the intervention communities, and the research committees associated with the WA Department for Child Protection and Family Support and WA Police.

Operation data were provided by the Operation RESET team from the Mid-West Gascoyne area and recorded onto Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Prosecutorial outcomes from the arrests and charges made during the intervention in the Mid-West Gascoyne were collected on a case by case basis by the RESET team once these cases had proceeded to trial.

Data from WA Police Information Management System were extracted by a police analyst who performed a search for child sexual abuse reports by setting parameters for location, date and type of offence, and collating the relevant case identification numbers. Each case was then checked by a research assistant who extracted information on region, town, incidence and reporting dates, and the outcome of the investigation (such as arrest, insufficient evidence, withdrawn, or no offender detected).

In the Mid-West Gascoyne, the RESET team was active in communities from April 2009 to September 2010. Therefore, three equal time periods, before, during and after the RESET intervention period, were used for comparison: Time period one (TP1) refers to the 18 months prior to Operation RESET: October 2007 to March 2009; time period two (TP2) refers to the 18 months during RESET (April 2009 to Sept 2010), and time period three (TP3) refers to the 18 months following RESET.
(October 2010 to March 2012). In the Pilbara, the intervention was in place for 20 months, and again three equal time periods were used: Time period one (TP1) refers to the 20 months prior to the intervention (December 2007 to July 2009); time period two (TP2) refers to the 20 months during the intervention (August 2009 to March 2011), and time period three (TP3) refers to the 20 months following the intervention (April 2011 to November 2012).

Data from the four non-intervention regions were segmented into the same time periods as the Mid-West Gascoyne for comparison, in order to ascertain whether results obtained for the intervention area were due to the effect of the operation in these areas, or if they were the effect of other trends that would be reflected in the data from different regions. Report and arrest data from the Mid-West Gascoyne and the Pilbara were segmented between intervention and non-intervention areas. Data from all other regions were analyzed by region. Population estimates for the Indigenous population and total population were obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a, 2013b).

**Data analysis.** Firstly, the team’s activities from the operation data were analyzed and documented. Following this analysis, a time study investigating the relationship between the team’s presence in a community and the date of individual incident reports was conducted.

For the second section of the analysis, the number of reports, number of arrests and arrest rates (rate of arrest per incident report) for each region (or area) by time period were compiled. Generalized estimating equations were used to investigate interaction effects for within subject (time) and between subject (intervention) comparisons (Liang & Zeger, 1986) using the Statistical Packages for
the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Generalized estimating equations (GEE) are an effective tool for analyzing repeated categorical response data, in order to make inferences about population or sub-population averages (Heagerty & Zeger, 2000). With this technique the mean response can be modelled, and parameter estimates will be consistent even if the covariance structure has not been correctly specified. The GEE technique is suitable for the analysis in the current study as it can allow for different types of unmeasured dependence between outcomes, and has been found to be a stable analysis method for this type of data (Ballinger, 2004). Number of reports, arrests and arrest rates per region were analyzed in three separate models for intervention and non-intervention areas. Post hoc paired comparisons were used to analyze differences between time periods. Significance levels were set at $p < 0.05$ for model tests and $p < .01$ for paired comparisons, due to the number of tests being conducted.

Results

Section 1: Data collected during Operation RESET

The relationship between the RESET team’s presence and reports of child sexual abuse was investigated. The data collected during Operation RESET included 135 incident reports of child sexual abuse, with 124 field investigations conducted, leading to 24 arrests. In order to explore the effect of the presence of the RESET team in the communities, the proximity of the team’s presence to the incidence reports was investigated. More than 72% of incidence reports were made during or within three working days of Operation RESET’s presence (proactive and reactive) in the communities, as shown in Figure 7.1.
Figure 7.1. Number of reports of child sexual abuse by number of working days since RESET team presence in communities.
Further information was obtained by the Operation RESET team regarding the prosecutorial outcomes of those arrested and charged during the course of Operation RESET and revealed an overall conviction rate of 54% (13 out of the 24 cases led to convictions). Of the eleven cases that were not convicted, nine were dismissed by the Director of Public Prosecutions and two were acquitted. Further analysis revealed that for the first nine months of the operation, of the 12 cases that were charged, seven (58%) proceeded to court. Of those, five were convicted, giving a successful prosecution rate of 71%. For the second nine months of the operation, eight out of 12 cases proceeded to court (66.7%), and all of these cases were successfully prosecuted (100%). These results indicate that there was an improvement in conviction rates as the model used by the RESET team was implemented.

Section Two: Data collected through the WA Police Incident Management System

Data for reports, arrests and arrests rates for the six regions, with the Mid-West Gascoyne and Pilbara regions split by intervention/non-intervention, are presented in Table 7.3. As can be seen by the population estimates for the Indigenous population, the areas of the Mid-West Gascoyne that were not covered by the intervention were small in comparison to those covered by the intervention, making up less than 10% of the total Indigenous population for the region.
Table 7.3


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Reports</th>
<th>Arrests (^a)</th>
<th>% A of IR (^b)</th>
<th>Indigenous Popn estimates(^c)</th>
<th>Indigenous per total popn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. MWG intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP1-pre</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>5392</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2-during</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3-post</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. MWG non-intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>584</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP1-pre</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2-during</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3-post</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Pilbara intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>801</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP1-pre</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2-during</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3-post</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Pilbara non-intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6410</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP1-pre</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2-during</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3-post</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Goldfields (^d)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4723</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP1-pre</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2-during</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3-post</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41.5</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>47.8</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Great Southern</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1650</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP1-pre</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TP2-during</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3-post</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Wheatbelt</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3747</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP1-pre</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2-during</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3-post</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. South-west</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3714</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP1-pre</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2-during</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3-post</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. TP1-pre = the time period prior to the intervention; TP2-during = the time period of the intervention; TP3-post = the time period post the intervention. \(^a\) Arrests includes ‘Offender Processed.’ \(^b\) % A of IR = percentage of arrests from incident reports. \(^c\) Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013a).
Numbers of reports increased between time periods one and two (pre and during intervention) for the Mid-West Gascoyne intervention and non-intervention areas (see Table 7.3a and b) which could be attributable to the presence of the Operation RESET team in this region. Given that the size of the Indigenous population in the non-intervention Mid-West Gascoyne areas is only approximately 10% of the total region, and that there could be expected spill-over from the intervention into these nearby communities, it is not surprising that there are also increases in reports in the non-intervention areas of the Mid-West Gascoyne. Number of reports also increased in the Pilbara intervention region (see Table 7.3c), but not in the Pilbara non-intervention areas (see Table 7.3d). In order to test the significance of changes between time periods by intervention status, three GEE models were produced for reports, arrests and arrest rates. Means with standard errors for number of reports per time period by intervention status for the models are shown in Table 7.4.

**Reports.** The GEE analysis of the number of reports indicated that the intervention by time interaction effect was not significant ($Wald x^2 (2, N = 24) = 4.61, p = 0.10$). There were significant differences for both the main effects

(Intervention: $Wald x^2 (1, N = 24) = 5.09, p = 0.02$; Time: $Wald x^2 (2, N = 24) = 60.85, p < 0.001$). Paired comparisons indicated that mean number of reports increased from TP1 to TP2 in the intervention areas ($Mean difference = 9.67, SE = 2.60, p < 0.001$), but not for the non-intervention areas ($Mean difference = 2.33, SE = 2.66, p = 0.38$). There was a non-significant decrease in the intervention areas ($Mean difference = 5.67, SE = 2.59, p = 0.03$) and a significant decrease in reports for the
Table 7.4

Means and Standard Errors of Generalized Estimating Equations Analyses by Intervention and Time-period for Reports, Arrests and Arrest rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Intv</th>
<th>Reports M (SE)</th>
<th>Arrests M (SE)</th>
<th>Arrest rates M (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TP1-pre</td>
<td>55.33 (8.37)</td>
<td>27.50 (4.61)</td>
<td>50.23 (3.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2-during</td>
<td>57.67 (7.99)</td>
<td>27.00 (4.08)</td>
<td>47.04 (2.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3-post</td>
<td>46.17 (9.61)</td>
<td>21.00 (4.78)</td>
<td>44.81 (3.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP1-pre</td>
<td>21.00 (6.55)</td>
<td>8.00 (1.63)</td>
<td>41.74 (4.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP2-during</td>
<td>30.67 (8.76)</td>
<td>16.33 (4.58)</td>
<td>53.31 (4.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP3-post</td>
<td>25.00 (11.03)</td>
<td>14.67 (5.89)</td>
<td>65.29 (6.77)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Non-Intv= non-intervention; Intv= intervention
non-intervention areas between TP2 and TP3 ($Mean\ difference = 11.20, SE = 2.85, p < 0.001$).

**Arrests.** The GEE analysis of numbers of arrests indicated that the intervention by time interaction effect was not significant ($Wald \chi^2 (2, N = 24) = 5.41, p = 0.07$). There were significant differences for both the main effects (Intervention: $Wald \chi^2 (1, N = 24) = 4.54, p = 0.03$; Time: $Wald \chi^2 (2, N = 24) = 15.94, p < 0.001$). Paired comparisons indicated that there was a significant increase in numbers of arrests from TP1 to TP2 in the intervention areas ($Mean\ difference = 8.33, SE = 3.07, p = 0.007$), but not for the non-intervention areas ($Mean\ difference = 0.50, SE = 2.29, p = 0.83$). There was no significant change in number of arrests for the intervention areas between TP2 and TP3 ($Mean\ difference = 1.67, SE = 1.66, p = 0.31$), and a non-significant decrease in arrests for the non-intervention areas between TP2 and TP3 ($Mean\ difference = 6.00, SE = 3.01, p = 0.05$).

**Arrest rates.** The GEE analysis of arrest rates indicated that the intervention by time interaction effect was significant ($Wald \chi^2 (2, N = 24) = 22.32, p < 0.001$). Paired comparisons indicate that differences between intervention and non-intervention areas increased over time. There was a significant increase in the arrest rate from TP1 to TP2 ($Mean\ difference = 11.56, SE = 4.30, p = 0.007$) as well as between TP2 to TP3 in the intervention areas ($Mean\ difference = 11.98, SE = 3.47, p < 0.001$), with no corresponding increases in the non-intervention areas (TP1-TP2: $Mean\ difference = 3.19, SE = 2.07, p = 0.12$; TP2-TP3: $Mean\ difference = 2.24, SE = 3.86, p = 0.56$).
In summary, reports and arrests increased between TP1 and TP2 in the intervention areas, but not in the non-intervention areas. Arrest rates increased in the intervention areas from TP1 to TP2 as well as from TP2 to TP3. There was no improvement in arrest rates between either time-period for the non-intervention areas.

**Discussion**

This study contains both the robust study design and reliable quantitative data required to evaluate changes in reporting rates of child sexual abuse during an intervention designed to improve outcomes for children, their families and communities. Qualitative information gained from the first evaluation of the intervention (Mace et al., 2015) indicated that there was a positive response from service professionals and community members in the communities where the intervention was implemented. The current study provides quantitative evidence that the intervention achieved its principal aim of increasing reporting rates.

The number of reports significantly increased in the intervention areas during the intervention compared to prior to the intervention, but did not increase in the non-intervention areas. Arrests likewise rose significantly in intervention areas but not in areas without the intervention between these time periods. A decrease in reports was evident in all intervention and non-intervention areas between TP2 and TP3, however the decreases seen in the intervention areas were not significant. One possible explanation of the overall decline in reports after the intervention is that professionals may have had a better understanding of mandatory reporting criteria over this time. On the first of January, 2009, mandatory reporting legislation came
into effect in WA, making it a legal requirement for all doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers and police officers to report all reasonable beliefs of child sexual assault. This caused a rise in reporting over all regions of WA as the legislation became known (Western Australian Department for Child Protection, 2008). During the implementation of these changes, misunderstandings regarding the types of behavior that should be reported resulted in many reports being lodged that were outside the bounds of the legislation. During 2010, an education program was promoted across WA to improve understanding of child sexual abuse and behavior that required mandatory reporting. This in turn may have resulted in a decline in reports throughout the year. No other major changes that could have affected reporting were observed, anecdotally or by police, during this time.

The decline in reporting in the intervention areas between TP2 and TP3 could be due to the better understanding of mandatory reporting as outlined above. Alternatively, it could be due to offenders having been removed from intervention areas by police, which then reduced the number of incidences occurring. A further possible explanation could be that after withdrawal of the intervention team, Indigenous persons were less inclined to report due to the support from and relationships with the RESET team no longer being available. The large arrest rate increase from TP2 to TP3 in the intervention areas, however, appears to indicate that the processes put in place by the team for the period post the intervention were successful. Arrests rates increased between TP1 and TP2 as well as between TP2 and TP3 in the intervention areas, whilst arrest rates remained stable in the non-intervention areas.
Analysis of the data collected on the team’s activities during Operation RESET indicated that there was a strong association between the group’s activities in the intervention areas and subsequent reporting behavior. Victims were most likely to report when the team was active in the intervention area. Importantly, successful conviction rates rose over the course of the operation’s presence in these communities, suggesting that the processes put in place to support victims going through the court system were increasingly successful as the team and support services built rapport with community members over time.

One of the limitations of this study is the inherent difficulty in working with secondary data sources such as police databases, where data are collected primarily for operational rather than research purposes. In order to ensure the highest quality data, a data reconciliation process between the incident reports supplied by the Operation RESET team and comparative data from the Incident Management System for the RESET intervention areas was carried out. This revealed some discrepancies between the data sets, with a number of cases that appeared in the RESET team dataset not included in the Incident Management System data. Further analysis revealed that many of these cases in the Incident Management System had been entered as ‘child abuse’ but not ‘child sexual abuse’ and were therefore not within the search parameters. These cases were predominantly where no offender was found and the case did not proceed. In cases where this practice had happened and the case had progressed, the anomaly would have been amended as further data were added. It is reasonable to assume that this practice would be systematically equivalent across the entire Incident Management System dataset, and therefore we can consider that report and arrest outcomes across regions within this dataset would be comparable.
Prosecution and conviction rates between intervention and non-intervention areas were not contained in the Incident Management System, and it was not possible to obtain these at the time of publication. A comparative assessment of successful prosecutions between intervention and non-intervention sites using data for all regions in WA would be an important next step for further research.

Overall, improvements in the number of reports and arrests as well as arrest rates in the intervention areas are consistent with broader reform in the area of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities, and support a rollout of the model used by Operation RESET. These findings, in conjunction with the prior qualitative study (Mace et al., 2015), suggest that these reforms have contributed to a major cultural shift and level of engagement between victims and service providers. The central concept underlying the development of the reforms is a more accessible, efficient, coordinated and user-friendly model of service delivery, where local solutions are developed for local problems. The findings of the current evaluation are entirely consistent with this concept.

As with any new system, there are opportunities for improvement. Further investment is required to isolate which elements of the intervention are the most important to implement in order to make the most efficient use of time and resources. Data need to be collated from numerous sources for ongoing evaluation, and extensive record keeping is required. As more information becomes available through the rollout of future intervention programs, researchers can begin to determine the most significant components of the intervention and the most cost-effective means of implementing change.
The evidence from this evaluation, based on police data with a large and representative sample of communities, suggests that the reforms have corresponded with a marked improvement in some key outcomes for Indigenous victims of child sexual abuse. We recommend that all Australian jurisdictions consider moving to the more proactive model that has been employed in the Operation RESET intervention, and that these findings may be applicable to other Indigenous communities internationally.
CHAPTER EIGHT: QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF OPERATION
RESET (Study 5)

The intent of Study 5 was to understand the issues from an Indigenous perspective, and to give voice to the Indigenous people who had been directly affected by the initiative. In order to support concepts of collaboration and listening in an Indigenous context, this paper was written in conjunction with an Indigenous researcher.

This paper has been submitted for review to *Australian Psychologist*. This journal has specific guidelines for structure, formatting and referencing, including a 5000-word limit for qualitative papers. This paper was prepared in accordance with these guidelines.
Indigenous Stakeholders’ Evaluation of a Community Engagement Initiative to Address Child Sexual Abuse in Remote Indigenous Communities

Cate Bailey, Tess Knight, Janis Koolmatrie, Sonja Brubacher, Martine Powell

The authors would like to thank the interviewers from across the three RESET sites. Particular thanks go to the Indigenous community members who contributed interviews for this evaluation.

Word count: 4824
Abstract

Objective: Child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities is prevalent and damaging, and finding solutions has been challenging. This study is an evaluation of Indigenous stakeholders’ experiences of an intervention aimed at addressing child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities in Western Australia.

Method: Nine interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis methodology. Interviewees included family members of children who had been sexually abused, and Indigenous service providers who lived in the communities.

Results: Three broad themes emerged from the analysis: communication, action and presence, and working together to address child sexual abuse. Stakeholders described how the engagement with the team was respectful and collaborative, communication and service provision were excellent and stakeholders felt that they had a strong part to play in the process. Engagement, trust, warm relationships and excellent outcomes were strong features of this initiative.

Conclusions: The operation was seen as a new way of working together, and was strongly endorsed by the Indigenous participants interviewed in this study.

Keywords: Aboriginal; Child sexual abuse; community engagement; evaluation; Indigenous; qualitative
Child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities is prevalent and damaging, and finding solutions has been challenging (Mulligan, 2008; Wild & Anderson, 2007). The contribution of past and present trauma, cultural clashes for Indigenous children in child protection systems, and family violence that has become embedded in many Indigenous communities, mean that this issue is highly complex (Keel, 2004; Stanley, 2003). An intervention that attempted to address the complexity of the issue of sexual abuse of Indigenous children, referred to as Operation RESET, was implemented in remote Indigenous communities in Western Australia in 2009-2011. The current study is an evaluation of the Indigenous stakeholders’ perspectives of the intervention.

Operation RESET was a collaboration between the Western Australian Police and the Department of Child Protection. It aimed to foster a genuine partnership of trust between team members and Indigenous community members. One of the core principals of the operation was that tackling child sexual abuse required a proactive, collaborative approach between community and government (Mace & Powell, 2012). Acknowledgment of the context and underlying causes of child sexual abuse were key features in this community engagement process.

The communities chosen for this intervention had a broad range of risk factors known to be associated with child sexual abuse and family violence, such as poor health and housing, high crime rates, pornography abuse, substance abuse, high numbers of teenage pregnancies and high rates of sexually transmitted diseases in children (Mace & Powell, 2012; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011; Wild & Anderson, 2007). Despite these risk factors, reporting rates of child sexual abuse in these communities were often low, or non-
existent. Anecdotal information from these communities indicated that low numbers of reports did not represent the day to day reality of community members. One of the key aims of the operation, therefore, was to address under-reporting of child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities.

Previous evaluations of Operation RESET have analysed stakeholder interviews (mainly service providers), and compared reporting and arrest rates between intervention and non-intervention areas (Bailey, Mace, Powell, & Benson, 2015; Mace, Powell, & Benson, 2015). These evaluations have demonstrated that there were increased numbers of child sexual abuse reports in intervention communities, as well as increased numbers of arrests. Improved community engagement, better service provision, and the development of trusting relationships between community members and authorities, were attributes documented in these evaluations. As part of the evaluation process, a scale was developed to measure attitudes to child sexual abuse. A study using this scale revealed that Indigenous stakeholders were more likely to believe that reports of child sexual abuse in the community were not taken seriously by police and welfare agencies than non-Indigenous stakeholders (Bailey, Mace, & Powell, 2015).

Whilst evaluations of the operation have been strongly positive, what has not been as well understood was how Indigenous stakeholders perceived the operation and its implementation in their communities. This study sought to understand the efficacy and value of this initiative from the standpoint of Indigenous community members. Hearing the voices of recipients of an intervention program is critical to an evaluation process (Mertens, 1999). It is particularly important when recipients have historically been from marginalised groups, such as the Indigenous peoples of
Australia (Carnes, 2011; Maddison, 2012), and when evaluating an intervention aimed to tackle a large power differential, such as is apparent in child sexual abuse. The current study used a qualitative analysis method to explore how Indigenous stakeholders’ experienced Operation RESET.

Method

Participants

The interviews used in the current study were drawn from the qualitative phase of the evaluation of Operation RESET. Interviews from this phase were conducted with a sample of participants from communities where Operation RESET had been implemented in Western Australia. A previous qualitative evaluation utilised interviews from the first of the three intervention sites. Although there were approximately three out of 64 interviews included in this publication that were Indigenous, this was not the main focus of the paper (see Mace, Powell, & Benson, 2015). The current study utilised data from all three intervention sites. Selection criteria for the current study were that participants were Indigenous and lived in the community where Operation RESET took place. Nine interviewees met these criteria. Four interviewees were family members of a child who had been sexually abused (three mothers and one grandmother), and five were community members who were also service providers. All interviewees were women.

Procedure

The design for the evaluations was approved by the university’s Human Research Ethics Committee, steering group committees from within the
communities, and the research committees associated with the Western Australian Department for Child Protection and Family Support, and Western Australian Police. All interviews used in the current study were conducted by Indigenous interviewers who had experience with working with community, welfare, and law enforcement. Interviewers were not associated with RESET, but were considered to be culturally competent, and were trained in non-leading, open-ended interviewing.

Interviews were one-on-one and conducted face-to-face. A conversational style of interviewing was used in order to ensure that the participant had the autonomy to direct the discussion towards experiences and concerns that were relevant to her, and to be able to attribute her own meaning to those experiences. Questions were asked to encourage further elaboration and clarification, and interviewers had discretion in the order and manner that questions were asked.

**Data management and analysis**

Interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis methodology as outlined by Braun and Clark (2006). This methodology is defined by six phases of analysis: familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing a report. The analysis method employed a constructionist perspective, searching for meaning and experiences that were socially produced, rather than inherent in individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Rather than focussing on motivation or the individual psychology of the participant, this analysis attempted to theorise the socio-cultural contexts that drive the individual accounts.
Interviews were audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. To preserve stakeholder anonymity, all participants were given pseudonyms, and only broad descriptors were used when quoting participants. Following the protocol from Braun and Clark (2006), the first two authors familiarised themselves with the interviews, and coded the interviews separately. The first author identified themes in the data, collating all data relevant to each theme. The first two authors then discussed the themes, and together made thematic recommendations that were subsequently reviewed with the other authors. During this review process the themes were defined and named. A report was constructed, including relevant examples from the data. Discussions with all authors were held to ensure that the themes adequately captured the content and meaning of the interviews.

**Results**

The analysis revealed three overarching themes: communication, action and presence, and working together to address child sexual abuse. These themes will now be discussed individually.

**Communication**

The importance of good communication was strongly felt by Indigenous community members and mentioned in each interview. It was perceived by participants to be central to the success of the Operation RESET. Core concepts within the theme were the initial engagement with community, reassurance, talking
about abuse, and being heard and acknowledged. (Quotations have been represented verbatim.)

**Initial engagement.** Indigenous family members appreciated the way that the RESET team initially approached them, and helped them to feel safe. Bobby describes it this way: “They come, they wasn’t sort of rough or anything. They sat down and explained things.” Here Bobby uses words such as not being ‘aggressive’ or ‘rough’, which gives us a glimpse of how she may have perceived interactions with service providers in the past. For Olive, being informed in an open and inclusive manner felt empowering: “They came tell me everything. They never kept any secret from me.” Daisy described the first meeting with the team at her house. They were: “very helpful, they made us feel like there was somebody there to help us get through it all. They made us feel comfortable….” For the family members, having an understanding of the processes and an open communication with the team was an essential part of the service that they received. These excerpts also reveal how the women’s expectations of these meetings were exceeded.

Indigenous community members who were also service providers were initially distrustful of the RESET team, but also described their initial engagement with the team in a positive light. Nancy talked about the need to test the team’s credibility when they first came into town: “So, I’ll sit down and listen to what they’ve to say. Then I find out they was helping the community too.” Helena describes how the team went about initiating communication with community members: “I really liked the way that they came in and then they asked us… ‘who are the right people to speak to?’…I just don’t think that there was a person in the community that they didn’t take the time to talk to.”
**Reassurance.** By helping the participants to understand that they were not alone in dealing with child sexual abuse in their communities, the team members were perceived as non-judgemental and supportive. “They made us feel comfortable. They told us that we were not the only people around that it was happening to.” Interviewees were reassured by knowing that the problem was not just restricted to them; other people in other communities were also known to be dealing with these issues. Margie states: “….to hear that [own] is not the only problem place that they’re to help, its, its really good.” Understanding that the abuse was widespread, rather than being confined to their community or their family, helped to remove the guilt that some participants felt, and allowed them to move on to deal with the issue.

**Talking about abuse.** Participants described how the RESET team encouraged the community to talk about sexual abuse. Irene said: “The older people have been talking and the younger people have been talking. I think a lot of the child abuse, sexual or otherwise has really calmed down because [perpetrators] know of the presence of RESET, and what they are about.” Helena described how the education element of Operation RESET helped the community to have a better understanding of child sexual abuse: “…there’s been a lot more discussion about sexual abuse in the community, and I think the education levels of the kids and people in the community has increased.” Empowerment through knowledge and social connection highlighted the communities’ previous silence and sense of helplessness in their situation: “…I don’t think that people in the community had that much exposure to it, to be able to talk freely about [sexual abuse] and to know what the hell to do.” Daisy states that she has only recently been able to talk about being abused herself, after many years of silence.
**Being heard and acknowledged.** Many of the participants described how important it was for family members, that the children were listened to and believed. Celia said of her daughter that: “…they knew that she wasn't telling lies…. They were on her side...it was a real good relief.” Bobby’s experience of the RESET team was that they were approachable and helpful, and in particular that she felt heard: “They are very understanding….they listened.” The feeling of being listened to, heard, and understood is important to the participants in these interviews. There is a strong sense that these women may have had many prior experiences where their voices have been silenced.

**Action and presence**

In terms of service provision and support, participants were overwhelmingly positive about the operation. Core concepts within the theme were consistency, action, enabling disclosure, and removal of perpetrators.

**Consistency.** The consistency of the Operation was seen as a strong factor in the success of the initiative. Team members came into communities every month. Each time they came, they maintained contact with families who were supporting children who had been abused. Daisy describes how when they were in the community, “even if they were here for some other biz [business], they will still come and check on us.” Community members always knew when the team would be coming back to town as it was written in the minutes of their community group meetings.

This consistency was important for community members whose experience had often been of having little control over major events that had affected their lives, and where service providers came and went without them having any understanding
of when or why. Irene describes how when “…government departments changed employees, [the community member] is going to have to tell that story all over again. Sometimes it’s embarrassing, and it’s really personal. They’ve just had enough. They’re not going to go and sit …and watch this white person filling out pieces of paper about the same story they told last time.” RESET was seen as different because the staff and visits remained constant, and relationships could be built and maintained. According to Nancy, “The team always came back to the community. We knew that they was going to come back because they always told us when.”

**Action.** Detectives in the RESET team were seen as being actively engaged in improving outcomes in the community. Daisy talked extensively about how the detectives made a difference in their lives, and helped her and the children feel safer: “I mean, a detective is better than a psychiatrist. Because…they’ve seen the children and they talk to the children; and a psychiatrist, they can’t see you, maybe a month or so down the track. But once a detective come and see you about their biz, they make you feel a lot better, and the kids are safer.” The detectives are perceived here as knowing the children and listening to them; the detectives have the ability to act immediately to improve the children’s safety.

The team adapted their way of working when cases were reported to them. Helena describes that: “In the start it was education of the community. They started off with engagement, engagement, engagement and then it moved to support. And when they started getting disclosures and charges, they changed their way of working with the community. They didn’t just get the disclosures and run back to Perth. They were there…working with the family after the disclosure. I don’t think I’ve ever seen that before.” The community experienced the team as operating within a new
framework, whereby communities were engaged and supported, and action was taken.

A further example of effective action was how the team dealt with the issue of payback, which was referred to in a number of interviews. Lynne, a safe house manager, stated that victim safety was often a huge issue in the community. She describes how the RESET team: “responded to the perpetrator’s family and calmed that down; stopped all that backlash and payback stuff from happening.” Celia describes her relief when issues of payback were dealt with: they “…left it in the hands of the police. When they charged him it just took that big relief off me.” The RESET team were seen as calming the desire for reprisal, and affirming that the process would be just.

Prior to RESET, silence was often seen as the safest option. Helena talks about the dangers for the child and their family if they reported abuse. “Before Operation RESET…a majority of the time… perpetrators were relatives, and it was kept quiet by the family. Either they would deal with it themselves, or …there’s just been a few really bad incidences of girls disclosing and the consequences that that girl has suffered as a result of disclosing. It was a culture in [town] that what happened to that girl, they don’t want that to happen to them. So they just didn’t say anything.” Nancy talks about how, despite the silence around child sexual abuse, everyone knew what was happening: “Everyone knows what’s been going on. But they just keep it quiet.” Lynne describes how, prior to RESET, a child who had been raped had been returned to her community the same day, due to lack of services. She was subsequently assaulted by the perpetrator’s family on the following day. Stakeholders describe a stark improvement in services once RESET was established;
families and community were supported to report and disclose abuse, and were supported through the process of taking these cases through the criminal justice system. This process was seen in a universally positive light in these interviews.

**Enabling disclosure.** Family members who had worked with the RESET team felt strongly that it was important to talk about sexual abuse, and to encourage people to disclose abuse to authorities. Daisy says: “Don’t be frightened to tell anyone, because it’s not going to harm you in the long run.” Bobby also encouraged other community members to disclose to the RESET team: “I’d encourage them [to disclose] and I’ll tell them like…so it won’t happen to another little one. Don’t feel guilty. You explain yourself and they’ll understand you and you’ll understand them.” The RESET team was seen as an independent and safe place for children to disclose, a place of mutual understanding where there was a common goal to protect the children.

The way the RESET team worked with children in order to encourage disclosure of sexual abuse, and supported them after disclosure, was appreciated by participants. Olive describes how her daughter came to slowly feel comfortable to talk with the RESET team: “she was a little bit - you know, shy, when she mentioned [it] - but she started talking to their mob now.” Participants noted that the RESET team kept working towards obtaining a disclosure. With Celia’s granddaughter: “…they kept on following up, following up. And like, the first part of it, they couldn’t find anything on [the perpetrator]. But then the second time they took him in, and when my other granddaughter gave a statement, then that’s when they charged him. …It was a big relief.” The team were persistent in following up cases, and trying to get outcomes for victims that were fair.
Removing perpetrators. Whilst there has been some evidence in previous literature of a hesitancy to report offenders due to fear of them being exposed to risk in prison, this was not evident in these interviews (Cunneen, 2009; Shepherd, Adams, McEntyre, & Walker, 2014). Removal of perpetrators from the communities was seen as positive by both family members and service providers, and participants expressed relief when perpetrators were charged. Participants wanted action, and they wanted offenders out of communities. Olive states: “I was really happy that [the perpetrator] went to gaol for that.” Celia’s reaction was that of being reprieved: “And when they came and told me that [the offender] had been charged, it was… a big…like a big relief.” Helena describes the difficulty in exposing offenders before the operation started. She says that community members knew who the perpetrators were, but they “kind of felt helpless, because if you did talk about sexual abuse prior to Operation RESET, you just didn’t have the support.” Family members were keen that offenders were brought to justice, and removed from communities.

Working together

Working together to tackle the problem of child sexual abuse was seen as central to the success of Operation RESET. Core concepts within the theme were trust, positive relationships and collective responsibility.

Trust. In all the interviews, the RESET team were perceived as people that they could trust. Many of the interviews described the relationship of community with local police and the Department of Child Protection (DCP) as being poor. While Daisy stated, “nine times out of ten you don’t get anything from the police anymore,” there was also an acknowledgement by participants that the local police had to manage a large portfolio of work, and that it was hard for them to focus on this issue.
Although RESET was a joint operation between police and the DCP, the efforts of the RESET team to engage with and encourage communication with the community engendered trust and strong, positive relationships. Nancy asserted: “we can trust [the team] to go and talk on behalf of our kids to the police and to the DCP. And they come back and report back to us what the police have said or what DCP have said.”

**Positive relationships.** This sense of trust was affirmed by the warm feelings that the family members, in particular, had for the RESET officers. Daisy states “I’m very fond of them.” The team was seen as doing more than just their job, but that they were personally engaged in the project. According to Helena, the community felt that “it wasn’t an operation just to tick the box and to get the numbers.” The team leader “had a huge effect on people. They just talk about him like he’s their mate, and I think that’s something that Aboriginal people have never had an opportunity to do before.” The relationships that the team built with community members was core to the success of the Operation.

**Collective responsibility.** The concept that the issue of child sexual abuse was everyone in the community’s responsibility resonated strongly with a number of the interviewees. Helena describes how the team leader “has got the spiel that he just says over and over about it’s everybody’s responsibility. It’s not just the police, it’s not just DCP, it’s not just the strong women. He spent a lot of time bringing [service professionals] all together.” The RESET team took an active role in encouraging all aspects of service provision to work together. Increased interagency coordination was noted by participants as a result of the RESET intervention. Families had a better understanding of where services were available, and were more empowered to request them. The operation teams were clear about the various roles of service
providers, and during the course of the operation, community members became empowered through their knowledge of the processes.

**Discussion**

This study played an important part in the series of evaluations of Operation RESET, as it represented the views of Indigenous community members who had direct experience of the operation. Engaging with Indigenous communities was central to the premise of the Operation, and thus evaluating the perceptions of Indigenous community members and service providers was crucial. The current research provided a spectrum of responses to Operation RESET by including interviews from family members who had direct interactions with RESET, as well as local service providers who were experienced in trying to tackle sexual abuse in their communities.

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to Operation RESET from Indigenous community members in both groups. Excellent two-way communication of the team with communities was particularly noted by participants. They experienced the team as engaging with community members at all levels, listening well, providing feedback, and maintaining a high level of communication over the course of the operation. Service provision was highly praised, both for its consistency, and for the positive actions that arose. Trust and warm personal relationships were also strong features of the initiative.

Prior to RESET, repercussions associated with disclosure of child sexual abuse meant that community members often regretted making a report. There was a strong sense from family members in the current study that, with the support of the
RESET team, they could be proud that they had spoken up, and been able to protect their children. Participants felt that the team’s presence and ability to act was far better than what had been experienced previously.

Although an exit strategy had been built into the initial project design to try to embed the gains made during the intervention over the longer term, there was considerable concern from participants about the team leaving their communities. The interviews presented in the current study were conducted at the end of the RESET intervention, and participants were asked how they perceived the future after the teams had left. Participants were clear that they wanted this presence maintained in the future, and were concerned about losing the team’s support. Irene was specifically concerned that losing the RESET presence in the community might mean that perpetrators would feel safe to start offending again: the team were “a great presence. I see a difference. As soon as that presence is lost, it will all flare up again.” An in-depth evaluation of outcomes in the years post the operation would be an important addition to future research.

In conclusion, this initiative was strongly endorsed by the Indigenous participants interviewed in this study. Family members who experienced the operation first hand had highly positive experiences and outcomes. Service providers who lived in the community found that the level of service provided by the RESET team was far above what had been experienced previously. Engagement, trust, warm relationships and fair outcomes were strong features of this initiative, which was seen by community members as a new way of working together.
CHAPTER NINE: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Child sexual abuse has had a pervasive presence in many Indigenous minority communities around the globe (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Collin-Vezina et al., 2009; Wynd, 2013). This thesis has contextualised such abuse in relation to the criminal justice systems of two Australian jurisdictions. Broadly speaking, the results were twofold. Phase one revealed that there were higher attrition rates for Indigenous cases of child sexual abuse than non-Indigenous cases. Differences were found on reporting rates and patterns, and in the collection of child evidence (forensic disclosure) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases of child sexual abuse. Phase two revealed that reporting rates were amenable to change by using an effective policing initiative, and that the initiative was strongly endorsed by Indigenous stakeholders.

This chapter summarises the findings of the two phases of this research in the context of four themes: child evidence in the form of forensic disclosure, reporting child sexual abuse in Indigenous populations, the importance of community engagement, and aspects of policing in Indigenous communities. After the discussion of these themes, the limitations of the work and suggestions for future research are presented. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings on future policy directions.

The importance of child evidence

Obtaining child complainant evidence is considered essential for the successful prosecution of cases of child sexual abuse (Lippert, Cross, Jones, &
Historically, the silence that has surrounded the topic of sexual abuse of Indigenous children has inhibited the likelihood of the reporting and disclosure of abuse, both within communities and to police (Stanley et al., 2003). In Study 1, lack of child evidence (forensic disclosure) was found to be one of the most significant reasons for cases leaving the criminal justice system, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. Previous studies have found that the police investigative stage was the main attrition point for cases of child sexual abuse, but these studies were unable to present any further information about where cases were failing (Fitzgerald, 2006; Wundersitz, 2003). This thesis has documented for the first time, that within the police investigative process, cases were most likely to fail at the forensic disclosure stage.

Although forensic disclosure was the main stage where cases in both cohorts failed to proceed, Indigenous cases were significantly more likely to leave the criminal justice system at this stage than non-Indigenous cases. This finding was consistent across the two target jurisdictions, but was particularly apparent in Jurisdiction A. Knowing where in the progression/attrition process Indigenous cases differ from non-Indigenous cases is important, as this knowledge provides empirical evidence that could help guide future policy decisions and program planning (for instance, a focus on working with communities to build on confidence to disclose).

The second study of this thesis extended the work by examining predictors of forensic disclosure in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. In the previous literature, when a child’s disclosure instigated an investigation, the child was found to be more likely to provide a subsequent forensic disclosure (Lippert et al., 2008). A similar finding was shown in Study 2, where previous disclosure (to a non-
authorised person) significantly predicted forensic disclosure in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cohorts. In Jurisdiction A, however, previous disclosure was significantly more predictive of forensic disclosure for Indigenous children than non-Indigenous children. Anecdotal evidence cited in government reports suggests that children were concerned about disclosing abuse in their communities due to community backlash (Stanley et al., 2003; Wild & Anderson, 2007). Community backlash could be a factor in the results from Jurisdiction A, where Indigenous children who had not disclosed previously were highly unlikely to disclose to police.

**Reporting child sexual abuse in Indigenous populations**

Prevalence and reporting rates of child sexual abuse can only be estimated from crime statistics, or through current or retrospective surveys. As such, evidence of under-reporting of abuse is difficult to find. Whilst it was not possible to obtain estimates of prevalence rates for sexual abuse crimes against Indigenous children from the data in these studies, there were some aspects of the results from Study 3 that might shed further light on this topic.

Study 3 revealed differential reporting rates between the Indigenous samples of the two jurisdictions. Analyses of case characteristics and case progression found that in the jurisdiction with the lower reporting rate, cases were more likely to be severe, and reporting of abuse was less likely to be delayed. Under-reporting, rather than lower actual incidence of child sexual abuse, was therefore the most likely reason for the lower reporting rate found in the second jurisdiction.

The amount of crime that is never reported to authorities is unknown, and difficult to estimate. It is often referred to as the ‘dark figure of crime’ (Lievore,
2003; Willis, 2011). In Study 3, the under-reporting found in Jurisdiction B gives a reflection or shadow of the unknown number of un-reported cases. This is an important finding, as the indications of under-reporting of abuse cases found in Study 3 may be of use in proposing systemic changes at the policing and policy levels (such as an increased focus on education of what constitutes abuse, and encouragements to report abuse).

The outcomes of the evaluation of Operation RESET revealed that changes in policing and policy were able to improve reporting rates in remote Indigenous populations. Techniques used by the RESET team, which included the use of proactive, community engagement policing techniques, and a more co-ordinated, whole of government response, were found to be associated with increases in reporting, and in police responsiveness to reporting. This evidence suggested that reporting rates were amenable to change.

The importance of community engagement

Government reports have noted the importance of community engagement in addressing sexual abuse of Indigenous children (Dudgeon et al., 2014; Hunter, 2008; Lippert et al., 2008; Mulligan, 2008; Wild & Anderson, 2007). Partnership between community and service providers has been suggested as a way to successfully address family violence in Indigenous communities (Calma, 2006). Collaboration between Indigenous agencies and service providers must focus on developing approaches that also have the approval of communities (Tomison, 2004).

The concept of community engagement has had a strong presence throughout the studies contained in this thesis. In Study 2, community-related variables, such as
previous disclosure and corroborating witness, were significant predictors of whether a case would contain a forensic disclosure. The predictor variables were described as community-related, because previous disclosure by the child was most often to family, friends or other community members, and corroborating witnesses were likely to be family or community members coming forward to support the child’s statement.

Community engagement was a key component of the Operation RESET initiative. It was found in Studies 4 and 5 to be an important contributor to the success of the operation (see also Mace et al., 2015). The importance of community factors in obtaining disclosures was also evident in Study 5 (the qualitative analysis). Indigenous community members indicated in Study 5 that they wanted to report and disclose sexual abuse in their communities, provided they felt safe and that they would be heard. Community members from areas where the initiative had been implemented, described feeling pride that they had spoken up about abuse, and had been able to support and protect their children.

**Policing in Indigenous communities**

This thesis revealed several findings regarding policing practices that are worthy of note. One finding related to police charging practices. In Study 1, no differences were found between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cases as to whether police would lay a charge, provided there was a forensic disclosure by the child. This suggests that biases from police were not evident at this stage.

A second finding related to interviewing techniques. Information was available in Study 3 to assess the success of interviewing techniques in the two target
jurisdictions. Anecdotally, interviewer training was known to be equivalent in both the jurisdictions. Study 3 revealed that where an Indigenous child had attended a forensic interview, there were no differences in disclosure rates between the jurisdictions. Disclosures in Indigenous cases were high, at 89.1% and 89.2% of cases in the respective jurisdictions. Differences in the findings across jurisdictions in Studies 1 and 2 are, therefore, not likely to be due to interviewer technique.

Differences in reporting rates between the jurisdictions for the Indigenous samples found in Study 3 could be due to policing or community effects. If there was a policing effect at play in the non-reporting of cases in the second jurisdiction, then policing practices may need to be reviewed. The high rates of forensic interviewing and charge rates for Indigenous cases in the second jurisdiction, however, indicate that police were active in responding to reported cases of child sexual abuse.

In Study 4, reporting rates were found to be amenable to change. The effectiveness of the strategies used by the RESET team to increase reporting rates, suggests that police can make changes in communities when evidence based techniques are employed. In the first intervention site, in the Mid-West Gascoyne region, more than 70% of reports during the eighteen-month intervention period were made during proactive visits of the intervention team or within three days of the visit. The high number of reports whilst the team was in communities suggests that the presence of the team had a strongly positive effect on reporting.

A final finding in regards to policing was the difference in the relationships the community members in Study 5 described with local police, compared to the intervention detectives. In most interviews, stakeholders noted that there were poor relationships between community, and local police and welfare agencies. The
intervention team were viewed differently by community members in intervention areas. The detectives in the team were trusted and respected, and in many cases stakeholders described being ‘fond’ of them or treating them as a ‘mate’. It was acknowledged by stakeholders that local police had a high workload that covered an array of crimes and requirements. The intervention team only aimed to tackle one main issue, and had a group of detectives and interviewers who had specialist knowledge for addressing child sexual abuse. Nonetheless, the type of policing employed in this intervention was found to be highly successful.

**Research limitations and directions for future research**

The most significant limitation of the thesis, as a whole, was the lack of follow-up data from the RESET communities in the years following the exit of the intervention teams. The original intention of the initiative was that teams would stay in communities for approximately 18 months. The evaluation strategy that was built into the planning of the operation was conducted until the exit of the teams from communities.

The only evidence of longer term outcomes contained in the evaluations of Operation RESET were the analysis of reports, arrests, and arrest rates in the eighteen months post the intervention period, contained in Study 4. In this study, numbers of reports remained significantly higher in intervention than non-intervention areas in the 18 months post the intervention period. This result suggested that the positive effect on reporting rates and police response was sustained over the short term. There were no data collected, however, to determine for how long this effect was sustained.
The importance of obtaining follow up data on the initiative was suggested by the strong fears expressed by Indigenous stakeholders in Study 5 regarding the withdrawal of the intervention teams from communities. Perpetrators were perceived as being unlikely to abuse children whilst the team had a regular presence in the town, but stakeholders were concerned that perpetrators would feel safe to recommence their activities after the team had gone. Participants in this study wanted the team, or a similar presence, to be retained in their communities.

The need for further evaluation of the long term effects of the Operation can also be found in recent anecdotal evidence from one of the RESET intervention towns. This evidence suggested that there was currently a poor response to child sexual abuse in this community. Local community members perceived there to be improvements during and immediately after Operation RESET, and some intervention teams were able to encourage community members to talk about child sexual abuse, and to empower them to address it in their communities. After the intervention, as staff withdrew and resources were lost, community members felt discouraged. There was a subsequent loss of trust in law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Services were described as being sub-standard, and offenders who had been removed during Operation RESET were returning to communities without plans to protect victims and other children. The ongoing presence of a dedicated team to proactively engage with community, to supply education and support services, as well as supporting children within the judicial system, was seen as essential by many community members.

Further research on the long term effects of the intervention would also need to address the effect on the community of having received good service provision,
and then losing it. This ‘coming and going’ of service provision may affect community morale, and short term projects that lack long term funding can leave communities in a worse condition than they were in previously (Wild & Anderson, 2007). Investigating this concern is beyond the scope of this thesis; it is, however, an important consideration when planning services that have a set implementation period. In order for long term benefit, governments may need to make a long term commitment (Cripps & Adams, 2014; Wild & Anderson, 2007). There is a strong need for future research on the long term efficacy of programs such as Operation RESET.

**Implementing change**

The evaluation of programs implemented in Indigenous communities appears, in many cases, to have had little effect on influencing change in government policy (Productivity Commission, 2012). The Productivity Commission report (Better Indigenous Policies: The Role of Evaluation) argued that Indigenous social policy should be evaluated in the context of the empowerment and involvement of communities. Indigenous programs, however, have rarely been evaluated in this way, and are often not evaluated at all. As stated by Dillon and Westbury, ‘How is it that governments … have allowed this level of systemic failure to continue for so long … while promoting worn out policy approaches that have proved to be unworkable?’ (2007, p. 192).

Even programs in Indigenous communities that have been evaluated and found to be successful, have had difficulties securing further or ongoing funding (Dillon & Westbury, 2007). In speaking to media about the increasing numbers of
child suicides in many remote Indigenous towns in the Northern Territory and Western Australia in 2016, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, stated that government policy was changeable and ad-hoc: "It's very, very frustrating… There's no consistent policy approach, there's no consistent funding and there is definitely a lack of real and meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" (Robinson, 2016). These are difficulties that may also be apparent for any possible future roll-out of Operation RESET initiatives.

The inherent purpose for implementing a pilot program, such as Operation RESET, is that it can be employed in other regions or communities if it is found to be successful. This would take place, of course, after being adapted to local conditions. Where successful programs have been documented, it is vitally important that this information is utilised as an evidence base to develop and provide services and programs that work. Implementing change in the RESET communities was found in this thesis to be heavily dependent on engaging communities in the processes of change. In Indigenous communities, where family dysfunction had been passed on through generations, RESET interventions were found to have a high level of utility and success. Effective frameworks are required, though, to maintain changes over the long term. The evaluations of Operation RESET contained in this thesis could contribute a solid evidence base for the formation of future initiatives in this area. The holistic approach of the RESET initiative may be considered to be a new benchmark in delivering programs in Indigenous communities.
Concluding comment

The overriding outcome of the five studies presented in this thesis was the importance of engaging community to successfully address sexual abuse of Indigenous children. The type of proactive policing that is needed to engage communities in this way requires adequate resourcing. The impetus for improving funding for projects of this type must come from government, and government requires the evidence base on which to make these types of decisions. This thesis presents this evidence. Best practice for delivering programs in Indigenous communities was found to be based on strong community engagement, the development of steady relationships between community and service providers, intergovernmental cohesion, and buy-in from stakeholders at all levels. Outcomes from this thesis suggest that, with proper resourcing and well-conceived, evidence-based programs that contain effective succession planning, successfully addressing child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities is, indeed, achievable.
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Appendices
# Authorship Statement- 1

## 1. Details of publication and executive author

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<td>Cate Bailey</td>
<td>School of psychology</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Cate.bailey@deakin.edu.au">Cate.bailey@deakin.edu.au</a></td>
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## 2. Inclusion of publication in a thesis

| Is it intended to include this publication in a higher degree by research (HDR) thesis? | Yes | If Yes, please complete Section 3 | If No, go straight to Section 4. |

## 3. HDR thesis author’s declaration

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<th>Name of HDR thesis author if different from above. (If the same, write “as above”)</th>
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If there are multiple authors, give a full description of HDR thesis author’s contribution to the publication (for example, how much did you contribute to the conception of the project, the design of methodology or experimental protocol, data collection, analysis, drafting the manuscript, revising it critically for important intellectual content, etc.)

Cate designed the methodology for the paper, oversaw data collection, management and quality control, conducted all the analysis, and drafted the manuscript.

**I declare that the above is an accurate description of my contribution to this paper, and the contributions of other authors are as described below.**

**Signature and date**

14/11/2016

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## 4. Description of all author contributions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name and affiliation of author</th>
<th>Contribution(s) (for example, conception of the project, design of methodology or experimental protocol, data collection, analysis, drafting the manuscript, revising it critically for important intellectual content, etc.)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Martine Powell</td>
<td>Involved in the conception this study and revising it critically for important intellectual content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonja Brubacher</td>
<td>Revising study critically for important intellectual content</td>
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Appendix A

5. Author Declarations

I agree to be named as one of the authors of this work, and confirm:

i. that I have met the authorship criteria set out in the Deakin University Research Conduct Policy,

ii. that there are no other authors according to these criteria,

iii. that the description in Section 4 of my contribution(s) to this publication is accurate,

iv. that the data on which these findings are based are stored as set out in Section 7 below.

If this work is to form part of an HDR thesis as described in Sections 2 and 3, I further
v. consent to the incorporation of the publication into the candidate’s HDR thesis submitted to Deakin
University and, if the higher degree is awarded, the subsequent publication of the thesis by the
university (subject to relevant Copyright provisions).

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<td>Sonja Brubacher</td>
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6. Other contributor declarations

I agree to be named as a non-author contributor to this work.

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* If an author or contributor is unavailable or otherwise unable to sign the statement of authorship, the Head of Academic Unit may sign on their behalf, noting the reason for their unavailability, provided there is no evidence to suggest that the person would object to being named as author.

7. Data storage

The original data for this project are stored in the following locations. (The locations must be within an appropriate institutional setting. If the executive author is a Deakin staff member and data are stored outside Deakin University, permission for this must be given by the Head of Academic Unit within which the executive author is based.)

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This form must be retained by the executive author, within the school or institute in which they are based.

If the publication is to be included as part of an HDR thesis, a copy of this form must be included in the thesis with the publication.
AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT- 2

1. Details of publication and executive author

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Cate designed the methodology for the paper, oversaw data collection, management and quality control, conducted all the analysis, and drafted the manuscript.

I declare that the above is an accurate description of my contribution to this paper, and the contributions of other authors are as described below.

Signature and date: 14/11/2016

Signature Redacted by Library

4. Description of all author contributions

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<th>Name and affiliation of author</th>
<th>Contribution(s) (for example, conception of the project, design of methodology or experimental protocol, data collection, analysis, drafting the manuscript, revising it critically for important intellectual content, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martine Powell</td>
<td>Involved in the conception this study and revising it critically for important intellectual content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonja Brubacher</td>
<td>Revising study critically for important intellectual content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Author Declarations

I agree to be named as one of the authors of this work, and confirm:

vi. that I have met the authorship criteria set out in the Deakin University Research Conduct Policy,

vii. that there are no other authors according to these criteria,

viii. that the description in Section 4 of my contribution(s) to this publication is accurate,

ix. that the data on which these findings are based are stored as set out in Section 7 below.

If this work is to form part of an HDR thesis as described in Sections 2 and 3, I further
x. consent to the incorporation of the publication into the candidate’s HDR thesis submitted to Deakin
   University and, if the higher degree is awarded, the subsequent publication of the thesis by the
   university (subject to relevant Copyright provisions).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of author</th>
<th>Signature*</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martine Powell</td>
<td>[Signature Redacted by Library]</td>
<td>16.11.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonja Brubacher</td>
<td>[Signature Redacted by Library]</td>
<td>15.11.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Other contributor declarations

I agree to be named as a non-author contributor to this work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and affiliation of contributor</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Signature* and date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* If an author or contributor is unavailable or otherwise unable to sign the statement of authorship, the Head of Academic Unit may sign on their behalf, noting the reason for their unavailability, provided there is no evidence to suggest that the person would object to being named as author.

7. Data storage

The original data for this project are stored in the following locations. (The locations must be within an appropriate institutional setting. If the executive author is a Deakin staff member and data are stored outside Deakin University, permission for this must be given by the Head of Academic Unit within which the executive author is based.)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Data format</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excel and SPSS spreadsheet</td>
<td>Deakin server</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This form must be retained by the executive author, within the school or institute in which they are based.

If the publication is to be included as part of an HDR thesis, a copy of this form must be included in the thesis with the publication.
# Appendix A

## AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT-3

### 1. Details of publication and executive author

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Publication</th>
<th>Publication details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of executive author</th>
<th>School/Institute/Division if based at Deakin; Organisation and address if non-Deakin</th>
<th>Email or phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cate Bailey</td>
<td>School of psychology</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Cate.bailey@deakin.edu.au">Cate.bailey@deakin.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. Inclusion of publication in a thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is it intended to include this publication in a higher degree by research (HDR) thesis?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>If Yes, please complete Section 3 If No, go straight to Section 4.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### 3. HDR thesis author’s declaration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of HDR thesis author if different from above. (If the same, write “as above”)</th>
<th>School/Institute/Division if based at Deakin</th>
<th>Thesis title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>Access to justice; Child sexual abuse in Australian Indigenous communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If there are multiple authors, give a full description of HDR thesis author’s contribution to the publication (for example, how much did you contribute to the conception of the project, the design of methodology or experimental protocol, data collection, analysis, drafting the manuscript, revising it critically for important intellectual content, etc.)

Cate designed the methodology for the evaluation, oversaw data collection, management and quality control, conducted all the analysis, and drafted the manuscript.

*I declare that the above is an accurate description of my contribution to this paper, and the contributions of other authors are as described below.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature and date</th>
<th>14/11/2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### 4. Description of all author contributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and affiliation of author</th>
<th>Contribution(s) (for example, conception of the project, design of methodology or experimental protocol, data collection, analysis, drafting the manuscript, revising it critically for important intellectual content, etc.)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martine Powell</td>
<td>Involved in the conception this study and revising it critically for important intellectual content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn Mace</td>
<td>Important in the conception of this study and in setting up the project that was evaluated in this paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mairi Benson</td>
<td>Advised on data collection and managing the dataset.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Author Declarations
I agree to be named as one of the authors of this work, and confirm:

xi. that I have met the authorship criteria set out in the Deakin University Research Conduct Policy,

xii. that there are no other authors according to these criteria,

xiii. that the description in Section 4 of my contribution(s) to this publication is accurate,

xiv. that the data on which these findings are based are stored as set out in Section 7 below.

If this work is to form part of an HDR thesis as described in Sections 2 and 3, I further

xv. consent to the incorporation of the publication into the candidate’s HDR thesis submitted to Deakin

University and, if the higher degree is awarded, the subsequent publication of the thesis by the

university (subject to relevant Copyright provisions).

<table>
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<td>16.11.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn Mace</td>
<td>Signature Redacted by Library</td>
<td>21/9/2016</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Contribution</th>
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If the publication is to be included as part of an HDR thesis, a copy of this form must be included in the thesis with the publication.
# Appendix A

## AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT - 4

### 1. Details of publication and executive author

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Publication</th>
<th>Publication details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of executive author: Cate Bailey</td>
<td>School of psychology</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td><a href="mailto:Cate.bailey@deakin.edu.au">Cate.bailey@deakin.edu.au</a></td>
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Cate co-developed the methodology for the paper and collaborated in coding the data. Cate developed the themes and collaborated in validated the themes. Cate drafted the manuscript.

I declare that the above is an accurate description of my contribution to this paper, and the contributions of other authors are as described below.

| Signature and date | 14/11/16 |

### 4. Description of all author contributions

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tess Knight</td>
<td>Co-developed methodology, collaborated in coding data and validating themes. Revising study critically for important intellectual content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Revising study critically for important intellectual content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonja Brubacher</td>
<td>Revising study critically for important intellectual content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martine Powell</td>
<td>Advising throughout the course of the paper, and revising it critically for important intellectual content</td>
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Appendix A

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If the publication is to be included as part of an HDR thesis, a copy of this form must be included in the thesis with the publication.
Evaluation of Operation RESET: An initiative for addressing child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities

Background

Operation RESET is a joint initiative between Western Australia Police Sex Crime Division (WA Pol) and Department for Child Protection and Family Support, (CPFS) which aimed to improve and support the ability of communities and agencies to uncover, respond to, and prevent child sexual abuse (CSA).

How the intervention was evaluated

Study 1- Numbers of reports and arrests in regards to CSA cases were collected from all regions of WA through the WA Pol Information Management System. Intervention and non-intervention (control) areas in most regions of WA were compared over three 18-month time periods; before (TP1), during (TP2) and after (TP3) the intervention. Operational data collected by the RESET team in the Mid-West Gascoyne for the life of the intervention was also analysed. ¹

Study 2- Analysis of in-depth interviews with 64 stakeholders of various backgrounds and affiliations who lived or worked in regions where Operation RESET had been deployed for the past 18 months. ²

What were the results?

The results of Study 1 were based on the three main aims of the intervention:

- **To uncover ...**
- **... respond to ...**
- **... and prevent CSA**

![Graphs showing changes in reports, arrests, and arrest rate over time periods TP1-pre, TP2-during, and TP3-post.](image)

- *Reports* increased almost 50%
- *Arrests* increased over 100%
- *Arrest rate* (arrest per report) increased for intervention areas, and continued to increase in the post intervention period.

---

¹ Bailey, C. M., Mace, G., & Powell, M. B. (Under review). Measuring community and service provider attitudes to child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities in Western Australia.

Appendix B

Operation Data

The data collected by the Operation RESET team included 135 incident reports of child sexual abuse, with 124 investigations conducted, leading to 24 arrests. In order to explore the effect of the RESET team’s presence in the communities, the proximity of the team’s presence to the incident reports was investigated. This graph shows the number of reports made during, and in the days after, the RESET team was in communities. More than 72% of incident reports were made during, or within three working days of, the team’s presence.

Interviews of community members and service providers

Study 2 revealed strong support for Operation RESET in the regions where it had been deployed. Stakeholders’ feedback identified four distinctive features of the reform that contributed to its success:

- Proactive outreach (i.e., the model brought specialised services to the people).
- Capacity building (i.e., the model improved skills, competencies, knowledge and abilities of professionals, agencies and communities).
- Brokering both holistic and integrated service provision.
- Genuine engagement based on trust.

Conclusion

The intervention was “A major step forward in improving relationships between community members and human services agencies, and has considerably assisted in maximising justice outcomes and victims’ wellbeing.”

Where to now?

Two additional papers complete this phase of the evaluation of Operation RESET:

- A study comparing survey responses (attitudes to, and knowledge of, sexual abuse) is under review.
- An analysis of the interview responses of Indigenous community members and service providers regarding the implementation of Operation RESET over three intervention sites is in preparation.

Updated 27 July 2015

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