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### Addressing the Rising Rates of Indigenous Incarnation: An Examination of The Use Of Restorative Justice in Canada

Katrina Hermle  
hermle@uwindsor.ca

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The Indigenous population only accounts for approximately five percent of the entire Canadian population, but overwhelmingly represent approximately 28 percent of the entire prison population (Malakieh, 2018). The high levels of Indigenous incarceration pose an issue for the Canadian justice system. Governmental policies have attempted to address high rates of Indigenous incarceration through the use of restorative justice. Restorative justice is an approach that addresses the impact of a crime and its impact on the victim by having the offender, the victim of the crime, and members of the community find solutions to deal with the aftermath of a crime (“Restorative Justice,” 2018). The Canadian government has employed various forms of restorative justice such as the use of sentencing circles and the use of healing lodges (“Correctional Service Canada Healing Lodges,” 2018). Healing lodges are correctional facilities which use Indigenous values and culture to address justice (“Correctional Service Canada Healing Lodges,” 2018).

Healing lodges offer a more holistic approach to justice and allow Indigenous offenders to connect with their indigenous culture while dealing with the impact of their actions (“Correctional Service Canada Healing Lodges,” 2018). This holistic approach has been effective in helping offenders become rehabilitated, meaning that offenders that take part in such programs will likely not reoffend (“Correctional Service Canada Healing Lodges,” 2018). In addition, the use of healing lodges has allowed offenders to provide restitution to victims and the members of the community impacted by a crime (“Correctional Service Canada Healing Lodges,” 2018). The effectiveness of healing lodges can be a solution to addressing the high incarceration rates amongst indigenous offenders. Despite the positive impact of healing lodges, there are opponents that view healing lodges as expensive and ineffective in rehabilitating individuals. Opponents to the use of healing lodges advocate that the traditional prison model is sufficient in delivering justice and rehabilitating offenders.

In addition, some health professionals believe that there should be an emphasis on creating resources and facilities, such as programs addressing substance abuse and mental health, in order to prevent Indigenous individuals from becoming incarcerated. Forty-one percent of the Indigenous population (ages 12 to 24) are likely to suffer from alcohol abuse (“Aboriginal Peoples Fact Sheets.” n.d). A survey conducted in 2003, found that 70 percent of Indigenous people have suffered from some sort of mental health-related condition or illness (“Aboriginal Peoples Fact Sheets.” n.d). Thus, Indigenous people are more likely than the general population to suffer from mental illness and/or substance abuse. Individuals suffering from mental illness and substance abuse are more likely to end up in prison than individuals who do not suffer from mental illness and substance abuse (“Mental Illness and the Prison System, n.d). There is a strong correlation and causal relationship between being in prison and suffering from previous mental health conditions and/or issues of substance abuse (Fisher et al, 2006). Creating programs, such as mental health facilities and programs, allows individuals to learn how to cope with various mental health conditions and address forms of substance abuse (Fisher et al, 2006). These programs would prevent such a causal relationship from existing and would act as a preventative measure in reducing criminal activity (Fisher et al, 2006). Overall, this would act as a solution in reducing the high Indigenous incarceration rates.

This research project will examine and compare the effectiveness of three policy approaches to solving the issue of high levels of Indigenous incarceration: creating more healing lodges throughout Canada; doing nothing and continuing the current use of traditional prison systems; and developing more facilities and programs that address issues relating to mental health and substance abuse. This project uses a cost-benefit analysis that compares and examines

various socioeconomic factors of each policy option to make an integrated conclusion regarding the best way to handle the issue of Indigenous over-incarceration. This project will use Statistics Canada and other academic journals to conduct the cost-benefit analysis.

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