



SELECT COMMITTEE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE  
IN THE COMMUNITY

SUBMISSION NUMBER 0006

*DATE:* 25 March 2002

*TABLED:* 15 May 2002

*RECEIVED FROM:* Indigenous Family Violence Reference  
Group

NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA  
**DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER**  
**OFFICE OF WOMEN'S POLICY**

GPO BOX 4396  
6884  
DARWIN NT 0801  
7523

TELEPHONE: (08) 8999

FACSIMILE: (08) 8999

EMAIL:  
owp@nt.gov.au

## **Preliminary Brief to Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory Select Committee on Substance Abuse in the Community**

### **Scope of Consultations**

The Indigenous Policy Officer in the Office of Women's Policy<sup>1</sup> consults with Indigenous women and communities in all regions of the Northern Territory routinely, and on specific program initiatives. Participating communities and individuals receive feedback on each of these initiatives.

This approach recognises that Indigenous women are under-represented in decision making, both outside and often in their own communities, and are sometimes less confident operating outside more traditional and familiar practices.

Consultations with Indigenous individuals, organisations and communities during 2001-02 are assisting to determine:

- Priority areas to advance Indigenous women in all aspects of community and Territory life.
- Approaches, messages, and the design of new educational resources to assist communities responding to family violence and sexual assault.<sup>2</sup>

An Indigenous Family Violence Reference Group provides guidance and input on these issues.

### **Methodology**

---

<sup>1</sup> The Office of Women's Policy initiates, co-ordinates, monitors and reports on whole-of-government policies and strategies for women.

<sup>2</sup> This is a community education initiative under the Northern Territory Government Domestic Violence Strategy.  
*Northern Territory Government*

The methodology for these consultations includes structured discussions, interviews, and presentations at open forums, gatherings, conferences, workshops, at Council meetings, and with groups of Elders.

2

The consultations will continue during 2002. Information will be used to assist the Northern Territory Government plan policies and Northern Territory Government Agencies to plan programs and deliver services.

The information will also be used to determine a Northern Territory position for discussions at the Darwin 2002 Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women.

Since January 2001, a total of 64 consultations have been initiated in communities or with Aboriginal organisations across all Territory regions. This has involved contact with over 324 Indigenous Territorians in both urban and remote locations. Consultations are continuing during 2002.

### **Findings<sup>3</sup>**

Early indicators' from the consultations show that Indigenous women are seeking a changing, stronger and more vocal role. That is, greater input into community based and broader Northern Territory program planning and evaluation. Further that special initiatives are required for this to occur.

Generally there is a high level of interest in issues relating to leadership and equity, income generation, safety and security, better access to health and education, and the importance of whole-of-community planning.

Indigenous women are increasing their range of leadership skills and roles, and find their quality of life threatened by issues relating to ill-health, financial uncertainty, domestic and family violence, and sexual assault. Women have identified that additional barriers include:

- A reliance on spoken rather than written language.
- Learning English as a second, third or more language.
  
- Isolation.
- Lack of information.
- Inadequate knowledge and limited education.
- And, in many communities, less opportunity than men to achieve economic independence.

---

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that these are interim findings, pending the completion of the consultation process, which will include consultations in communities not yet visited, feedback and checking for confirmation with communities visited. A report on the consultations and the process will be published under the Office of Women's Policy Occasional Paper series.

The consultations indicate that there is agreement, or consensus, on the issues identified across the Northern Territory, although priorities change among regions and at different times.

Indigenous Territorians have consistently emphasised the inter-relationship among the issues discussed during these consultations. There is, for example, a primary relationship between alcohol and drug mis-use, family violence and sexual/child

3

abuse, and the well being and viability of that community. Indigenous Territorians stress the importance of whole-of-community planning and women have identified the importance of involving both women and men in planning and testing proposed solutions, that is of "*walking together*".

A table setting out this information is at Attachment 1. This table contains the words of Indigenous people and should remain confidential. Specific information should not be released to the media or used for other purposes.

## **Related Research**

The Office of Women's Policy manages and reports on the Northern Territory Domestic Violence Data Collection Report. This has been set up to track reported domestic and family violence incidents across the Territory. It is a comprehensive system that has established a solid collection of statistical information from 1994 and is ongoing. It is unique across Australia in that it incorporates government and non-government agency reporting, includes data from the NT Police database, PROMIS.

At this stage the domestic violence data collection project is the only jurisdiction-wide collection of statistical information in relation to domestic and family violence. Reports are routinely published to make the information available to the community, stakeholders and service providers. Copies attached.

Reports include statistical information on reported incidents of Indigenous family violence, which show that Indigenous Territorians are over-represented with 62% to 76% of reported incidents involving Indigenous Territorians.

More generally, 65% to 84% of all reported incidents indicate that offenders throughout the Territory were affected by alcohol or other drugs at the time of the incident.

It is important to emphasise that, while there are many factors which co-exist with (and often exacerbate) domestic and family violence including alcohol and other drug abuse, these are commonly recognised as 'situational factors' and not perceived as 'causes' or excuses for violence.

A copy of the 1999 Domestic Violence Data Collection Report is at Attachment 2. A summary of the statistical findings for 2000 is at Attachment 3<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> Copies of all Domestic Violence Data Collection Reports, and summary factsheets are available from the

It is anticipated that the Indigenous Family Violence Reference Group and the Domestic Violence Working Group will submit more detailed information to the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory Select Committee on Substance Abuse in the Community once submissions are advertised. The Indigenous Family Violence Reference Group will seek to present information by delegation rather than in writing.

Eileen Cummings  
Indigenous Policy Officer  
16 January 2002

Table summarising issues identified **by** Indigenous Territorians in establishing priority areas to advance Indigenous women in all aspects of community and Territory life.

**Notes:**

1. Indigenous Territorians have consistently emphasised the inter-relationship among the issues.
2. The words of Indigenous people have been used as much as possible to retain original intentions.

Priority Area	Related issues.
Alcohol and substance abuse / mis-use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alcohol and drugs are causing most of the problems in communities. There is too much rape and abuse of women and kids, and fighting because of this. This is bringing community life down.</li> <li>• There is too much 'gunja' (marijuana) in communities. When people are drinking all the time and taking drugs they become angry, violent, swear, don't worry about themselves and want to hurt themselves and others.</li> <li>• Young men (sons) are fighting and bashing mothers and grandmothers for money for alcohol, drugs and kava.</li> <li>• We have to try things in the 'Aboriginal way' to stop the drinking and fighting. There is too much gunja and young people use it more and more. We need to work more with young people to give them hope, jobs, the old ways back.</li> </ul>
Family violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels of family violence are far too high. Women are bashed, bullied, raped and sometimes killed by old and young men, husbands, and sons/grandsons. 'Indigenous women are dying from violence ... from being bashed and raped'.</li> <li>• Children and young people are not learning the old ways; they are learning the wrong way of behaving.</li> <li>• Some women also drink and bash their husbands and need help.</li> <li>• Women do not want to report incidents because they do not want men to go to jail and when men do go to jail they often blame the woman for sending them, and punish them as soon as they get out.</li> <li>• Drinking and drugs make men 'silly' and they want to fight and bash their women. We need programs to help men to stop.</li> </ul>
Child abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When parents have problems children are neglected and lack proper care, they often have to be cared for by other family members. The system does not easily recognise this or change as quickly as families do. Young people/children run away from home to escape violence and then they have nowhere to live. They aren't allowed to leave the community without permission. Sometimes, children move into homes that are not 'good'.</li> <li>• Young parents move children in and out of grandparent's homes, and the children get very unsettled and this affects schooling and the way they behave. Just when they settle the parents want them back and then leave them again.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older children feel angry and frustrated because they have to act like parents to younger children when parents 'aren't there' or are 'on drugs' - sometimes when they take on the role of the parent these young people also become abusive, or start drinking.</li> <li>• Abused children rarely talk about their problems or confide in anyone, they are ashamed and often turn to alcohol and substance mis-use, take drugs or become offenders and sometimes they commit suicide.</li> </ul>
Sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women are still promised as brides. Men have changed the rules and don't wait for young women to come into their homes or to grow up, 'the men go and get them before the proper hand over' - or 'want sex too early'. Young girls end up with diseases, sick, pregnant, poor health and sometimes die.</li> <li>• Men of all ages rape women, including young girls and older grandmothers, especially when drinking or on drugs.</li> <li>• Men 'change' Aboriginal law to suit themselves. It is not traditional for 'individual men to rape women'. Sometimes violence happens to punish a family who have wronged a clan, and young women just get caught up. Under traditional law, men who raped women were killed for 'punishment'.</li> <li>• Rapes are happening too often in communities, and children see and hear this happening, 'then they grow up to do the same'.</li> <li>• Women feel 'shamed' about rape and do not want to talk about it so they don't report the rape. Older women try and encourage young women to talk about it and try and get them to report it - but the young women won't.</li> <li>• Women who are raped often 'can only talk about it long time after', sometimes too late as the man has moved.</li> <li>• Young women often 'don't care any more' after being raped - they go into 'self destruct' behaviour. Sometimes the behaviour changes a lot, and others notice and ask why and 'this is when it comes out'. Sometimes when Indigenous people are run over, they have deliberately slept on a road as a way of 'killing themselves'. Some women set themselves on fire to commit suicide because of rape and shame.</li> <li>• Older women are being bullied and raped by young men in the community on pension day - male adolescents are bashing their mothers for money to spend - young children are raped because men are drunk or using drugs.</li> <li>• Older (respected) Indigenous women should be with young women when they talk to police and others about rape but 'they are left out of the talking'. It is their role/responsibility to look after other women. Something needs to be done so that young people respect the 'old ways'. Old people have to be able to teach the 'proper' way.</li> </ul>
Women's role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The traditional role of women is being 'lost' in Indigenous communities, at the same time Indigenous Councils are 'pushing women' to do more about things like violence and abuse, education and good eating on the communities without acknowledging their role and contribution. Women are often left out of Indigenous and non-Indigenous decision making. They are getting too tired and too busy, 'there's so much to do'. Not many women are on Indigenous community councils and have limited access to Council decision</li> </ul>

	<p>making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government agencies still usually meet with and consult men, as men usually hold the decision-making positions. These structures do not acknowledge 'women's business' outside the traditional role of women. Extended family members, usually grandmothers, are increasingly called on as carers to young infants and growing children because parents do not have adequate skills, 'drink all the time and use drugs'. Elder women/grandmothers need assistance and respite when providing parental care.</li> <li>• Women want to work together, to change people's ideas, to get stronger and be included as things change.</li> </ul>
Employment and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women are reluctant to leave communities and children to attend conferences/workshops, get training, or go to educational institutions. To avoid conflict/jealousy/fighting/suspicion women need to get agreement to travel outside of their community. As a consequence, Indigenous women strongly prefer to travel and train with other women, they do not want to travel or attend programs alone.</li> <li>• Too many young girls are pregnant and having children too early. They need information on health. delaying having babies, and caring for children.</li> <li>• Positive parenting courses/training/role models are needed in communities to assist young mothers be better mothers.</li> <li>• Schools 'are in a bad way in communities'-'kids are not learning'. Schools blame parents for the poor eating, study and living habits of students and parents blame schools for 'bad schooling'. New things need to be tried rather than everyone blaming each other and nothing changing.</li> <li>• Indigenous people should be on school councils, and councils should be involved in everything.</li> <li>• Elders have to train children and young people in skin relationships, and to understand and respect the Aboriginal way - some of this should be done in schools.</li> <li>• Train young people in two-way respect for culture and family life.</li> </ul>
Economic issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women want access to funding that communities get to start small businesses/initiatives. At the moment men make all the decisions.</li> <li>• Women still don't get enough money for food and families, as men spend it on grog, drugs, gambling and cars. Women then get 'humbugged' for the small amounts of money they do have, which means they have even less to spend on the family.</li> <li>• Men and women gamble and would like to see a system in place to save money for food and other things.</li> <li>• 'Book-up' systems in stores causes problems - and stores sometimes keep bankcards and even get pin numbers so that money can be taken straight out by the storekeeper. This happens in towns not just remote communities.</li> <li>• Women often don't get paid for the work they do in communities even when they are running safe houses, resource centres, youth programs.</li> </ul>
Family care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grandmothers/older women are being held responsible for child caring/rearing of children at a time when they are older, tired, and need to pay attention to their own health. They need 'places to rest' if they have to be parents again.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and training for family life are important if things are to change.</li> <li>• Our people have always shared food, money, their home. This often puts a strain on other children, the family and 'there are too many people in one house'.</li> </ul>
<p>Access to services such as housing, health, children issues include:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The system does not allow for Aboriginal people to accompany family members who are going to hospital, or want health care. For example, Aboriginal people need someone to go with them when going to hospital in other towns or states, 'they would rather not go than go alone'. Also they don't get help with somewhere to stay if away from home with a sick person. The family left behind also needs support. When services try to help they often 'get it wrong' e.g.; putting a man a hostel that has pregnant women in - 'this is not allowed, particularly for law men'.</li> <li>• There is overcrowding in some homes, which can make people drink and take drugs, then they 'go silly and beat and rape women and start fighting'.</li> </ul>