

THE IMPRISONMENT OF MAORI

- A major factor fueling the growth in the prison population in the decades 1950-1990 has been the dramatic rise in the imprisonment of Maori. In the 1920s, 4% of the prison population were Maori, rising to 6% in 1930 and 15% by 1940. (*Justice Statistics.*) Between 1950-1990 there was a seven-fold increase in the number of Maori sent to prison - about four times the comparable non-Maori increase. (*Justice Statistics 1990, Dept. Statistics 1991, p.19.*)
- Although making up just 4% of the total population aged 15 years and over, in 1950 Maori accounted for 18% of sentenced prisoners. Over the period 1950 to the mid-1970s the number of Maori offenders sent to prison grew at an average annual rate of 8.8%. By 1989 Maori were 49% of sentenced prisoners while making up 8% of the total population 15 years and over. (*Justice Statistics 1990, p.19.*)
- In 1997, where ethnicity* was known, Maori accounted for 52% of all non-traffic cases resulting in imprisonment while making up 10% of the total male population over 15 years and 14.5% of the whole population. (*Conviction & Sentencing of Offenders in New Zealand 1988-1997, P.Spier, 1998, p.36.; The Use of Imprisonment in N.Z. Min. of Justice, 1998, p.28; 1998 NZ Yr.Bk.*)
- During 1997 Maori entered prison at 8 times the rate of non-Maori. Sentenced Maori males were generally younger (61% under 30 years) than their European counterparts (44% under 30 years). (*Census of Prison Inmates 1997; The Use of Imprisonment, 1998.*)

Table 1: % Male and Female Prison populations by Ethnicity* over Prison Censuses 1991-1997

Prison Census Year	Maori		European & Maori		European		Pacific People	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1991	43%	47%	2%	2%	41%	39%	9%	6%
1993	43%	51%	3%	2%	38%	37%	10%	5%
1995	45%	50%	4%	6%	39%	39%	10%	4%
1997	44%	42%	5%	13%	38%	37%	10%	3%

(* Ethnicity is based on self-identification. Since 1991, the percentage of prisoners not providing ethnicity information has increased from 7% to 24% in 1997. Figures rounded. Source: *Census of Prison Inmates 1997, p.81.*)

- The table over indicates there has been little change in the proportions of various ethnic groups in prison between 1991 and 1997, except for women, in the categories 'Maori', and 'European and Maori'. This may reflect a shifting identification by women.

What factors help explain these outcomes for Maori?

- Official reports draw a link between Maori **urbanisation** and imprisonment. The dramatic rise in Maori imprisonment, beginning in the 1950s, coincided with an acceleration of Maori moving from rural to urban areas. Maori urbanisation has been described as the most rapid on record for any ethnic minority anywhere in the world. (*Gibson, 1973, cited in Justice Statistics 1990, p.23.*)

In 1945, three quarters of the Maori population lived in rural areas. By the mid-1970s the reverse was true with three-quarters of Maori living in urban areas, increasing to four-fifths by 1981. (*New Zealand Official Year Book, 1998, Statistics N.Z.p.102.*)

- Today's offending by Maori cannot be divorced from the spiritual and material poverty created by the ongoing consequences of **colonisation**. (*The Maori and the Criminal Justice System, Jackson, M., 1988; & 'Ten Years On', Conference Report, 1998.*) Colonisation is 'in effect a form of subjugation, in which throughout the period of colonisation, the colonised country has been deprived of true sovereignty.' (*Dict. Of Political Thought, R. Scruton, 1996, p.83.*)
- By 1996, Maori comprised 27.7% of all the **unemployed**. (*New Zealand Now - Maori, Statistics N.Z. 1998 Edition, p.68.*) Maori unemployment is highest amongst younger Maori and at a rate three times that of Europeans. (*N.Z. Year Book, 1998, p.312.*)
- Officially published research asserts that, once apprehended, Maori offenders **fare less well in the judicial process** than their Pakeha counterparts, being more likely to be prosecuted, to be convicted, and to receive more severe sentences. (*C. McDonald, 1986, Department of Justice, cited in Justice Statistics 1990.*)
- Research into the health and development of a Canterbury birth cohort of children (to the age of 15 years) has examined ethnicity and socio-economic factors in offending. This concluded, that for children living in the South Island, apparent ethnic differences in offending rates can be largely or wholly explained as being due to the combined effects of the **socially disadvantaged** status of Maori and Pacific Island children and bias in police contact statistics. (*"Ethnicity and Bias in Police Contact Statistics, D. Ferguson et al, in Aust. & N.Z. Journal of Criminology, December 1993, pp.193-206.*)

On the basis of self or parentally reported offending, children of Maori/Pacific Island descent offended at about 1.7 times the rate of Pakeha children. However, on the basis of police contact statistics, and despite committing identical offences, these children were almost 3 times more likely to come to police attention than Pakeha children. These results were consistent with the hypothesis that **official police contact statistics contain a bias** which exaggerates the difference in the rates of offending by children of Maori/Pacific Island descent and Pakeha children. (*as above p.193.*)

- Maori have lower median **incomes** than non-Maori for all occupations. In 1996, Maori full-time employed, were almost two and a half times more likely than non-Maori to be in the lowest income range (<\$10,000) than in the highest income range (>\$50,000). 31% of Maori were in the lowest income quartile, and over-represented in the lowest two household income quartiles. (*New Zealand Now - Maori, Statistics NZ 1998 Edition pp.73-85.*)