



Bandyup Action Group

a subcommittee of the
Deaths in Custody Watch Committee WA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 31 MARCH 2015

PRISON IGNORES ADVICE FROM OWN CLIN PSYCHS ABOUT CELL SHARING AT OVERCROWDED BANDYUP Women sleeping on stained mattresses in double-bunked cells designed for one

Action must be taken immediately to address the overcrowding at Bandyup women's prison, where women are put at risk of physical and psychological harm by being 'doubled up' in single cells.

Bandyup Action Group has heard that the Department of Corrective Services is acting on the advice of its public relations people rather than the advice of its own qualified clinical psychiatrists, who recommend their patients do not share cells in order to prevent further psychological harm.

Some women in Bandyup cannot be 'double bunked' for either their own wellbeing, the wellbeing of others or for public relations reasons. It appears that women who have had high-profile cases will not be doubled up because the Department does not want any adverse publicity should it come out that a woman on remand or in for a trivial offence, such as fine default, was forced to double up with someone who has had a lot of negative media coverage. These high-profile women have not even requested to be kept in a single cell.

Women whose cases are not so high profile but who cannot be double bunked for their own wellbeing risk being re-traumatised by sharing a confined space with another woman. Ninety per cent of the women at Bandyup are victims of violence and sexual abuse (OICS report, p. 32). Potentially women may regress and lose privileges they have earned, jeopardising the chance of parole, despite consistent recommendations from clinical psychiatrists to keep some women in single cells to prevent further harm.

There is a legitimate need to stop the practice of women sleeping on the floor with their heads next to toilets but the prison infrastructure cannot accommodate additional beds being squeezed in. Installing bunk beds is an ad hoc 'fix' that is inappropriate and will not solve the long-term crisis of overcrowding at Bandyup. While there may be an increase in the number of beds, there has been no increase in showering facilities or access to telephones.

The WA Government plans to send women to Hakea men's prison at a cost of \$20 million to refurbish units and to rebuild a wall that was torn down years ago. Not even the Department knows where the money for this will come from and the Prison Officers' Union has criticised the plan, suggesting that women in Bandyup be moved to the underused Wandoo facility instead. Bandyup Action Group supports this suggestion, as there are simply too many minimum-security women in Bandyup who could greatly benefit from the facilities provided at Wandoo.

We call on the government to act now to address the overcrowding:

- release all women in prison for fine default and other trivial offences
- accommodate bail for women on remand
- release minimum-security prisoners to home detention, or parole if necessary

This would immediately reduce the population of Bandyup to a manageable size. We hope it will not take a death in Bandyup before the government acts on the numerous suggestions, reports and recommendations on women's imprisonment in WA. The prison has estimated that by the end of 2015 there will be 370 women in Bandyup and 450 by mid-2016, possibly more if the government continues its ill-conceived 'tough on crime' agenda.



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Women are being told the 'double bunking' and other measures to address the overcrowding, such as split recreation time, are the result of OICS reports and advocates like ourselves, speaking up about the appalling conditions. This is an absurd shifting of blame for the overcrowding. The conditions at Bandyup cause stress and harm to prisoners and to staff. Many staff may not feel they can speak up about these issues; we urge these staff to report when they see something and do not let further harm be perpetrated on the women in Bandyup.

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Background and statistics

In 2014 the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) released a report that described Bandyup as the 'hardest and most neglected prison in the state'.

In December last year, there were 348 women at Bandyup. More than one-third (n=121, 35%) of these women were on remand.

Maximum security: 32 (9%), including 13 on remand

Medium security: 253 (73%), including 93 on remand

Minimum security: 63 (18%), including 15 on remand

Total number of people imprisoned for fine default in WA in 2013: 1358

Number of Aboriginal people imprisoned for fine default: 590

Number of women imprisoned for fine default: 358

Number of Aboriginal women imprisoned for fine default: 223

Indigenous people as a percentage of the population: Nationally: **2.5%** In WA: **3.8%**

Indigenous people as a percentage of people in custody: Nationally: **26.1%** In WA: **38.5%**

Indigenous women as a percentage of all women in custody: Nationally: **29.3%** In WA: **51.5%**

Sources

Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services, *Report of an announced inspection at Bandyup Women's Prison*, Report 93, OICS, Perth, 2014.

L. Bartels, *Indigenous women's offending patterns: a literature review*, Research and Public Policy Series No. 107, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 2010.

WA Parliament, Hansard LC, 3 December 2014.



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P. Papalia, 'Locking in poverty: how Western Australia drives the poor, women and Aboriginal people into prison', WA Labor Discussion Paper, Perth, 2014.