

# Sample essay on how do indigenous women in australia tackle womens issues

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Australia, being both a country and a continent, is home to different races of mankind. And among the white people that we have known as the common faces of Australians today, Indigenous or Aboriginal people also occupy a space. Aboriginal people were the primary inhabitants of Australia before its colonization in late 1700s by the European mariners (Australian Government, 2008: web). Up until this day, Australian Indigenous population is struggling very hard to preserve the culture they once established. Nowadays, Indigenous people of Australia, closely adhering to their culture, are the modern faces of poverty and discrimination in the land they once considered theirs. And the government has a role to play with this issue. The ostentatious display of negligence by the Australian government is one thing that is said to stem from the avoidance to cross or cause serious alterations in the culture that the Australian Aboriginals live by. Now, the issues involving abuse of Indigenous Australian women is the most pressing concern within the Aboriginal society. And we are yet to unravel what might be the possible causes behind this negligence of the Aboriginal women. Has the Australian government really contributed to grievances that the Aboriginals face? And if so, in what manner has the government contributed? How do the Aboriginals address the problems they are facing? What troubles are the Indigenous women most concerned about? What has the government or other human rights agencies done to redress the grievances experienced by the Aboriginal women and what contributions has the Australian Indigenous population done to straighten up the issues they face, especially the ones that involve gender and race discrimination?

Australian Indigenous population, however smaller in population in general,

represents greater number of victims of discrimination and poverty; of abuse and violence in Australia. This problem stems from the way non-Aboriginal Australians see the Aboriginal Australians—addressing them as the inferior race. This perception of native Australians by modern inhabitants of Australia—mostly of white races—contribute to the pressing issues of discrimination and abuse among the Aboriginal population—especially involving women. But, with reference to the claims of elevated or greater abuse and discrimination of Aboriginal women in comparison with non-Aboriginal Australian women, how are the Aboriginal women abused and discriminated? Where does the discrimination come from and who are the primary offenders of Aboriginal people's rights?

With regards to neither sex nor age, the native population of Australia has experienced severe inequality since the colonization of their lands by the Europeans (Thomas, 1993: 139). Aboriginal Australians under European colonization had no freedom to choose for themselves, were deprived of the liberties they once enjoyed, and were treated as if belonging to the bottom line of the societal hierarchy. As they remained within the grasp of European colonizers, the discrimination went on and offense on their rights became worse—especially with Aboriginal women. Under European power, Aboriginal women were the ones who suffered greater sexual abuse and discrimination (Thomas, 1993: 140). Up until this day, this pressing issue of women abuse and discrimination among Aboriginal Australian women are still causing rumpus within the Australian society. According to a statistical report conducted by White Ribbon Australia (Flood, 2013: 3), Aboriginal women that are abused sexually comprise the majority of sexually-abused Australian

women—that is, they are greater in number compared to non-Aboriginal Australian women that were abused as observed and recorded within 12 months prior to the release of the report. Furthermore, it is reported that more Indigenous Australian women are abused sexually and physically as compared to non-Indigenous Australian women. In addition to the report of White Ribbon Australia (Flood, 2013: 3) comparing the rate of abuse among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian women, 20% of Indigenous Australian women suffer from physical abuse considerably greater compared to the 7% physically-abused non-Indigenous women. With regard to sexual abuse, it is reported that sexually-abused Indigenous women are three times greater than non-Indigenous women abused the same way (Flood, 2013: 3). Also, in 2002-2003, it is recorded that 15% of homicide victims in Australia are represented by Indigenous women, despite the fact that they only represent 2% of the entire Australian population (Flood, 2013: 3). Across various states of Australia, it is reported that in total, Indigenous women are 5 to 45 times more likely to experience physical abuse and 16 to 25 times more likely to be exposed to sexual abuse compared to non-Indigenous women (Flood, 2013: 3). The entire report perfectly provides an image of the notoriety of women abuse in Australia, regardless of ethnicity or cultural background. But focusing better on the statistics we just reviewed and applying it to our study of Aboriginal women in Australia, it is very evident that Indigenous women are far more abused and discriminated in Australia and it is obviously attributable to the difference in cultural background. The fact that Indigenous women are Indigenous and that they were once held captive under another country's power and influence, may be considered as

the root of the motives behind their discrimination and abuse. As was shown by the statistics, abuse on Aboriginal women in Australia is not a simple case of sex offense or discrimination. It involves a far wider array of factors—most pressing of which is their cultural background that seems to be something that is hard to accept or treat equal as their own by the modern population of Australians. But how do Aboriginal Australian women face the issues of discrimination and abuse involving themselves? How do they cope with their oppressors and what do they do to rise from the negative situations that they are currently in?

Despite the alarming rate of sexually- and physically-abused Indigenous Australian women, Indigenous women themselves place greater focus on other problems that are directly related to their abuse and discrimination. As they have identified, problems with authorities that should implement laws to protect them are the greatest culprit, probably because the loss of a governing body that will look after the welfare of the entire population of the Aboriginal women also means losing people that will protect them, laws that will prevent others from abusing and discriminating them, and awareness of the fact that they need protection and sense of equality. As Thomas (1993: 140-143) reported, abused Indigenous women are more disturbed with the fact that the authority that was supposed to look after them are instead the ones who violate their rights and these governing bodies include (1) police, (2) courts, and (3) abused women counseling services.

According to Aboriginal women from various states in Australia, police force cannot be trusted in the events that they need rescue or someone whom they can complain and confide instances of abuse to and this is because of

the fact that police officers are sometimes the ones who abuse Aboriginal women (Thomas, 1993: 141). Also, police officers in Australia have a very low perception of Aboriginal women, therefore ignoring their complaints and cry for rescue whenever faced with immediate danger (Thomas, 1993: 141). Police service is also not available all the time in Australia, resulting to delayed response in cases of emergency situations in connection to violence and physical abuse (Thomas, 1993: 141). Also, the lack of a women's desk or a department within the police force that includes, but not limited to, women police officers that will be solely concerned with the rescue and complaints of abuse in women—especially of the Aboriginal ones—is seen as a very critical deficiency in the entire Australian police force (Thomas 1993: 141). The availability of this department may have been helpful as this could help abused women—especially those in state of shock and trauma—to be somewhat confident in bringing up complaints. This could also help extend the efficiency of police force to solve cases of abuse and violent crimes against women as this provides abused women a more comfortable support system that will let them relate their experiences of abuse to people whom they could trust and believe to understand their situations.

Another branch of Australian authority that the Aboriginal women are concerned with as they cannot expect this to be reliable for them is the court and its system. According to Thomas (1993: 142), Australian courts treat Aboriginal women as inferior citizens and are therefore not afforded the appropriate attention and proceedings they need in cases of their abuse being brought in court. Also, probably because Aboriginal women see the court system of the new modern Australian inhabitants as foreign, they are

unable to follow through the whole proceedings of their cases and because of this, Australian courts often see Aboriginal women as nuisances in court and a waste of time (Thomas, 1993: 142). Aside from this, courts in Australia do not recognize rape as sexual assault in Aboriginal women, rather they see rape as an inseparable part of the Indigenous culture (Thomas, 1993: 142). The court also provides little support for Aboriginal women who are victims of abuse—oftentimes treated as defendant in cases where they are supposed to be the plaintiff or the aggravated (Thomas, 1993: 142).

The unavailability of counseling services that would solely tackle the issues of abuse among Aboriginal women is also seen by the Aboriginal women as an essential need that they are not provided with. In cases where counseling services are available, the absence of fellow Aboriginal women as counselors is also treated as a pressing need that needs to be addressed and responded immediately. Also, the need for a counseling system that will closely monitor the situations of abused Aboriginal women is also a need greatly desired by the community of Aboriginal women, abused and not.

These grievances that cause concern among Aboriginal women who are victims of abuse are the main reason why the cases of reported abuse among Aboriginal women is low compared to the actual rate of the violence and abuse that take place against them. Considering these factors, how has the Australian government addressed the issue? Are there reforms already implemented for the safety of Aboriginal women?

Over the years, the pressing concerns about the welfare and safety of Aboriginal women in Australia has caused various authorities worldwide to take part and raise awareness of the current situation that most Aboriginal

Australian women experience. Among the various governing bodies and authorities that continuously campaign for awareness of the welfare of Indigenous Australian women is the United Nations, which has been organizing forums that address the needs of Aboriginal women in Australia. The UN has been setting the stage for Aboriginal women themselves to speak for the entirety of Australian Indigenous population, therefore letting the primary concerns of Aboriginal women be spoken by someone who actually knows the entire situation. Since the establishment of Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982 in Geneva, Switzerland, Aboriginal women have been continuously appointed as speakers and leaders to represent the population to which they actually belong (UN, 2010: 1). This is a leap of a movement in establishing awareness of the current situation of Aboriginal women in Australia. This movement by the UN signifies worldwide recognition of the rights of Aboriginal women and objection to crime and discrimination done against them. Aside from this contribution in favor of Indigenous women in Australia, other international authorities have taken part in promoting awareness of the need of Aboriginal women to live in a community safely and peacefully—that is safe from the hands of the same people whom they share the community with and whom they expect to be the first ones to treat them with respect.

On 2001, Commission on Human Rights has appointed a Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People, Dr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, for a three-year period (Kambel, 2004: 27). The main aim of this move is to (1) record relevant information in connection to violence and offense against Indigenous people, (2) to redress the



problems regarding violations on the rights of Indigenous people, and (3) to monitor the Indigenous people and assure their welfare (Kambel, 2004: 27). Furthermore, in 2000, UN established the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues which covers countries across UN—among which, Australia is a founding member. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues aims to (1) address and provide expert advise on Indigenous issues within the countries it encompasses, (2) raise awareness and promote integration and coordination of activities related to Indigenous issues, and (3) disseminate information on Indigenous issues (Kambel, 2004: 28).

These actions taken by international authorities outside Australia provide the Aboriginal women of Australia access to the counseling and campaign for acceptance and equality that they have always longed for. As we have discussed early on, counseling services that will continuously check on and look after the welfare of Australian Aboriginal women is one of the needs that Aboriginal women of Australia themselves consider as pressing in response to the abuse that and discrimination that they experience. But how about the Australia, the very confines where abuse and discrimination take place? What has Australia done to address the problems faced by the Aboriginal women?

Australia, despite being the very oppressor of Indigenous women within their community has begun to change their perspectives of their Indigenous women. Steps have been already taken to make sure that Indigenous women in Australia are afforded the privileges that they are originally entitled to as members of the Australian community. According to Hancock (2006: 20-25) Australian people and government are addressing the needs of Australian

Aboriginals: need for health care, acceptance, communication, and sense of equality. Australia now has been beginning to accept the part that the Aboriginals play in their community and their need to be treated equally as the other, non-Aboriginal members of the community. Australians are now addressing the primary needs of Aboriginal members of their community—primarily the need for acceptance and communication. The following is a direct quote from Hancock suggesting his view on acceptance of Aboriginal women.

Aboriginal women have different country origins, different languages, different traditional beliefs, and different lifestyles; but they can also have shared ideologies, plans, aspirations and needs. At another level within particular Aboriginal groups there can also be differences. (Hancock, 2006: 25)

This quote of Hancock shows very clearly the continuing growth of awareness of the diversity of Aboriginal women among Australian community. Recognizing this is a good indicator that measures done by authorities outside Australia in connection to Aboriginal women's rights is giving a positive outcome. But how do Aboriginal women themselves campaign for their own rights and privileges? What have they contributed to uphold themselves?

Aboriginal women in Australia nowadays are continuously striving to break free from the chains that once held them captive and unable to fend for themselves. The injustices that have marred their perception of what is just are now gradually being put behind. More and more Aboriginal women—not just in Australia—are taking the center stage of today to raise awareness of

their need for equality and proper treatment. One Aboriginal woman in Australia, Pat Kopusar has led the talk concerning how Aboriginal women should rise and stand up against the injustices being thrown at them. In her talk titled, "What is Life? Australian Indigenous Women's Perspective," Kopusar has bravely addressed the real problems aside from sexual abuse and violence that violate the rights of Australian Aboriginal women. Her talk focused not just on the physical and sexual abuses that are being experienced by the women in her society but also on problems of land disproportion. According to her, Aboriginal women live by the policy of self-determination and are therefore utilizing it to assert their right as equal citizens of Australia (Kopusar, no date: 6). Furthermore, Kopusar has stated, in behalf of all the Aboriginal women struggling to make a difference and change the overall perception of their race, that Aboriginal women of Australia are taking one step at a time, addressing issues and locating the main root of it so that it will be resolved more efficiently (Kopusar, no date: 7). Resolutions in connection to the current issues of Indigenous women in Australia, as Kopusar said, should begin at the homes of the Aboriginal families (Kopusar, no date: 7). According to Bartels (2010: 3), as much as there are Aboriginal women who are offended more than the non-Aboriginal women, Aboriginal offenders are also greater in number compared to non-Aboriginal members. Furthermore, Indigenous women are 9.3 times more likely to offend compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Bartels, 2010: 3). This rate of offense is attributed towards Aboriginal people may greatly be related to domestic violence within Aboriginal households. Applying what Kopusar has said with regards to issues within the households of Aboriginal

families, it may really be helpful to start assessing first, what are the usual problems faced by Aboriginal families on their own. The great rate of crime reported above may be attributed not just to feelings of inequality but also to domestic violence that also takes place within the homes of Aboriginal families. Recognizing this gives us an opportunity to assess other angles of issues regarding Indigenous people. Also, Kopusar (no date: 7) said that issues on Indigenous inequality and violence may best be responded with a strong adherence to the culture that they preserve and by establishing programs that will provide support and acceptance to Indigenous people, especially women.

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