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Whai tikanga: In pursuit of justice.
Māori interactions with the criminal justice system and
experiences of institutional racism

A thesis

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Eleanor Brittain

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Abstract

The criminal justice system in Aotearoa, New Zealand has a destructive history of interactions with Māori. Considered alongside the broader context of colonisation, this history provides a backdrop against which to understand contemporary Māori experiences of institutional racism. This research project aims to provide a robust understanding of Māori historical, contemporary and lived experiences of institutional racism within the criminal justice system. Participants were five Māori adults who have had personal encounters with the criminal justice system. They were interviewed about their experiences within the criminal justice system, with a focus on their experiences of institutional racism. As Kaupapa Māori research, within the field of discursive psychology, deficit constructions of Māori were rejected and there is an explicit inclination toward a constructive narrative of Māori culture, identity, and history. From the analysis emerged four recurring linguistic resources; blatant racism, Māori and Pākehā identities, Māori as trapped in the criminal justice system, and Māori identity and culture as strength. Participants' perspectives of the criminal justice system reveal that prevailing power relations facilitate the belittling of Māori identity, intrude on Māori rights, and diminish cultural integrity. Institutional racism is constructed as enduring and guided by notions of Māori cultural inferiority. The criminal justice system has persistently operated to disadvantage and marginalise Māori and the discussion extends on arguments for a separate Māori criminal justice system.

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