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**THE IMPRISONMENT
OF WOMEN
IN
NEW ZEALAND**

1840 - TO THE PRESENT DAY

A SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis presented as partial fulfilment of a Master Of Social Work,
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Mrs. Jane Manahi (*Aunty Jane*), Kuia and whole-hearted supporter of all those in Christchurch Women's Prison who served from 1989-1995.

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Kia kaha, Aroha Nui

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines women's imprisonment in New Zealand from 1840 to the present day. It describes the major developments in penal reform in New Zealand during this period from the perspective of their impact on women's imprisonment. Women's imprisonment, while subject to the same legislative reform as that of men's prisons, has in addition been affected by societal attitudes towards women and their social status. Prison regimes for women have consistently been more punitive, less reformatory and less well resourced than that provided for men. While some differential treatment can be attributed to the low numerical representation of women, perceptions about their criminality, their femininity, their class and ethnicity have determined their treatment.

Whilst the major developments in gender equity during the latter part of the twentieth century have advanced the situation of women, women in prison have remained largely unaffected by them and more likely to be the objects of patriarchal power and decision-making. The situation of mothers and their dependent children remains unsatisfactory and subject to the whims of penal policy-makers and administrators.

The position of Maori women, who are significantly over-represented in the prison population, has been overlooked by mono-cultural structures and processes in the criminal justice system.

Recent developments in penal policy and the regulatory environment of prisons pertaining to women specifically, indicate that administrators and some prison managers have made attempts to address some of the major issues for women's imprisonment in limited ways.

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