Reviewer's report

Title: Life years lost to incarceration: inequities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians

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Reviewer: Stuart Kinner

Reviewer's report:

1. This paper estimates incarceration rates and time spent incarcerated in Canada according to sex and Aboriginality. It replicates a method used in a previous paper (ref #3, Harm Reduction Journal 2008, 5:4), to which author Druyts contributed. If this information is not available in Canada then the estimates provided here may be useful for Canadian researchers and policy makers. I am unsure why this would be of interest outside of Canada.

2. I found the title misleading -- "life years lost to incarceration" might have referred to how incarceration impacts on life expectancy, but in fact this paper simply estimates life years INCARCERATED. The "lost to" is a value judgement that is not separated from the data. In the Discussion the authors argue that "it is critical to consider the serious health consequences associated with the use of incarceration as a means of punishment". Setting aside the somewhat one-sided discussion (there is also evidence that incarceration can improve health, at least in the short term), this paper unfortunately provides no information whatsoever on the health consequences of incarceration. I wonder whether this paper may be better suited to a criminology journal.

3. The literature review is very brief and overall the paper is very much focussed on Canada -- and therefore may be of limited interest to readers outside of Canada. This focus is reflected in references that non-Canadian readers may have difficulty understanding -- for example, what is a CANSIM table? What is Bill C-10 about?

4. If information on incarceration rates in Canada by sex and Aboriginality are not publicly available, then this paper provides useful new information. However, I find the language "life years lost" misleading and struggle to see the international relevance.

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.