



# Research at a glance

## Ethnocultural Offenders: An Initial Investigation of Social History Variables at Intake

*Ethnocultural offenders have less established criminality and may have different intervention needs than White and Aboriginal offenders.*

### Why we did this study

Little research specific to federally-sentenced ethnocultural offenders<sup>1</sup> exists and, of what does exist, none has focused on offenders' social history. Social history – which refers to experiences of the individual, family, or community, and can also include intergenerational impacts of earlier experiences – has been recognized as important in judicial and correctional decision-making and offender management.

### What we did

The current study aimed to begin to explore the issue of social history among ethnocultural offenders by leveraging readily-available data on life experiences and pre-incarceration background collected as part of the offender intake process. Data were available for 725 ethnocultural offenders in eight areas: criminal history, community functioning, education and employment, attitudes, associates, substance use, marital and family, and personal/emotional. Data for White and Aboriginal offenders were also included for contextual reasons.

### What we found

Ethnocultural offenders had less extensive prior criminal histories and were much less likely to be identified as having problematic substance use patterns than White and Aboriginal offenders. Taken together with previous findings that ethnocultural offenders tend to be assessed as presenting lower levels of risk and criminogenic need, these results suggest that ethnocultural offenders may have less established criminality than White and Aboriginal offenders.

<sup>1</sup> An ethnocultural offender is defined as one who has specific needs based on race, language, or culture and who has a desire to preserve his or her cultural identity and practices. For the purposes of analyses, offenders who were neither White nor Aboriginal were considered.

Results also suggested that the areas where ethnocultural offenders might most benefit from intervention may differ from those most pertinent for White and Aboriginal offenders. For instance, the rate of suspected gang affiliation among ethnocultural offenders was about twice that of White offenders while, as mentioned, rates of problematic substance were much lower among ethnocultural offenders.

### What it means

In addition to simply increasing knowledge, this study may also act as a spring-board in eliciting discussions and information sharing, through a lens of cultural competence, regarding both individual offenders' life experiences and possible reasons for the differences between ethnocultural, White, and Aboriginal offenders.

Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) staff members receive ongoing training and are provided resources to assist them in meeting the unique needs of ethnocultural offenders. Overall, this training, together with knowledge from studies like this one, can facilitate relevant and respectful dialogue, inform interactions and interventions with offenders, and contribute to the development of strong cross-cultural skills.

### For more information

Keown, L. A., Gobeil, R., Biro, S. M., & Ritchie, M. B. (2015). *Ethnocultural offenders: An initial investigation of social history variables at intake* (Research Report R-362). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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