

## CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

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# A Qualitative Study of Ethnocultural Offender Correctional Experiences: Programs, Services, and Community Connections

*Ethnocultural offenders constitute a heterogeneous group united by strong motivations to participate in and benefit from correctional programs and services.*

## Why we did this study

In Canada, research on racialized persons in the correctional system has generally focused on Indigenous offenders. Less is known about the correctional experiences of Ethnocultural offenders (i.e., non-White, non-Indigenous persons who want to preserve their cultural identity and related practices). Black persons make up the largest proportion of Ethnocultural offenders.

## What we did

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect information on (1) the experiences of Ethnocultural offenders participating in correctional programs and services while incarcerated and (2) the perceived relevance and utility of correctional programs supporting the return of Ethnocultural offenders to their community.

Offenders on conditional release who self-identified during CSC's admission screening protocol as being of ethnocultural background were eligible to participate during the recruitment period (2019-08-01 – 2020-08-31).  $N = 39$  offenders volunteered for the study, including 14 women and 25 men, 13 of whom (34%) self-identified as Black.

## What we found

Most of the participants rated their cultural identity as important, women (92.9%) more so than men (83.4%). However, the findings highlight the definitional complexity and heterogeneity of persons categorized as Ethnocultural. When identifying as a member of a racial, cultural, and/or ethnic group, those interviewed used terms that crossed racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and geographic lines. Nine participants chose not to identify as belonging to a racial group. Religion was often tied to characterizations of culture, and culture linked to race and geographic space (e.g. "Afro-Caribbean", "Filipino").

When asked if they felt their ethnicity, culture, spirituality, or religion affected access to programs or services, women (57.1%) were more likely than men (16.7%) to answer in the affirmative. Still, almost all of those interviewed (87.5% men, 100% women) participated in and completed programs while in prison. Employment skills training and education were

described as the most useful programs. Almost all interviewees reported taking part formally or informally in social program activities.

The majority (89.4%) of participants reported feeling prepared to return to the community. Women (85.7%) were more likely than men (66.7%) to agree there were services or resources they would have liked to access but were not available or offered.

Most men (62.5%) and half (50%) of the women interviewed reported that program facilitators made an effort to respect their ethnocultural background and needs, though overall only about half (51.3%) described members of their case management team or other institutional staff as having made an effort to acknowledge the same. Nearly half (47.4%) of participants reported specific instances of feeling disrespected.

## What it means

Ethnocultural offenders constitute a heterogeneous group that is, however, characterized by a strong motivation to participate in and benefit from correctional programs and services. Women are more likely than men to experience their ethnocultural background as central to their identity and to experience it as a barrier or obstacle. While offenders reported being prepared for release, greater knowledge and resources to address the needs of such a diverse group may improve the abilities of institutional staff to work effectively with ethnocultural offenders.

## For more information

Greco, C., Brown, G.P., Barker, J. et al., (2022). *A Qualitative Study of Ethnocultural Offender Correctional Experiences: Programs, Services, and Community Connections*. (Research Report R-443). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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