

## **Occupational Therapy Interventions for Incarcerated Indigenous Individuals within Federal Correctional Settings**

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**Background:** Occupational Therapists support both physical and mental health across the lifespan within federal correctional settings. Indigenous people who are in correctional settings represent about one quarter of the Canadian federal correctional population, but little is known about occupational therapy evidence-based practices with this population. Throughout this report, various Indigenous groups will be referred to based on how they were described in original articles.

**Objective:** The objective of this review was to examine what therapeutic programs and interventions have been used with Indigenous populations in correctional settings.

### **Methods:**

For this project, a search strategy was developed with guidance from a librarian scientist at Queen's University. To begin the development of the search strategy, three important concepts were identified: Correctional settings/jails/prisons, Indigenous peoples, and programs/therapy/interventions.

Articles that described interventions and best practice recommendations with incarcerated Indigenous individuals were retrieved from a literature search of CINAHL, Medline, OTseeker, and PsycInfo.

Quality of evidence for interventions and programs outlined in each article was appraised by two independent reviewers using JBI and CASP tools and the NICE Traffic Light System (2019)

An Indigenous-specific appraisal tool was used to determine relevancy of articles to Indigenous communities' measures of success and appropriateness.

### **Results:**

Out of 643 articles, 17 were included.

Of the included studies, 7 were from Australis, 5 were from Canada, 3 were from the United States, and 2 were from New Zealand.

Three articles described best practice recommendations, 2 articles described psychotherapy approaches, 3 articles described skills training interventions, 1 article described group/peer support, 2 articles described art therapy interventions, 2 articles described community reintegration interventions, 1 article described spiritual interventions, and 3 described other interventions related to education and spirituality.

### **Main Findings and Themes**

This scoping review highlighted several important interventions and key considerations that can be made while working with incarcerated Indigenous individuals.

### **Programs that Support Community Reintegration**

Programs that aim to reduce reoffending and support incarcerated individuals with community reintegration are common.

A life skills and vocation training program reduced recidivism rates in group of incarcerated Native Canadians (Place et al., 2000).

The Tiaki Tangata program provides post-release support and tailored community reintegration plans to promote successful transitions and reduce recidivism rates in formerly incarcerated Maori individuals (Sullivan et al., 2016).

Reintegration plans include support and resources in accessing employment, housing, health care, and mental health services and collaboration with Maori community organizations (Sullivan et al., 2016).

The Tupiq program combines Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with education on Inuit culture and values. Program participation can reduce the rate of reoffending in Inuit individuals incarcerated for sexual offences (Stewart et al., 2015).

### **Programs Targeted for Individuals Incarcerated due to Sexual Offences, Substance Use, and Domestic Abuse**

Programs work to develop healthy thought patterns and behaviors to reduce recidivism and improve offender's outlook on life.

Outcomes are achieved through participation in sweat lodge ceremonies, education programs that use a psychosocial approach, and training in problem solving skills (Gossage et al., 2003; Grobsmith & Dam, 1990; Place et al., 2000).

An alcohol education program that assists participants in altering their drinking behavior was found to improve participants' self-reported health, personal disposition, and relationships (Crundall & Deacon, 1997).

An alcohol use program that uses motivational interviewing techniques showed positive results with American Indian individuals (Woodall et al., 2007).

A family violence program that uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy methods can reduce reoffending rate in Indigenous men (Blatch et al., 2020).

### **The Value of Indigenous Art Programs**

Art-based therapy programs can be valuable for incarcerated Indigenous individuals due to its importance in many Indigenous cultural groups. Art programs for Indigenous offenders can enhance self-reported well-being, emotional coping skills, and increase offenders' connection to their culture (Hanley & Marchetti, 2020; Rasmussen et al., 2018).

In a creative writing program for incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, participants reported enhanced self-esteem, skills development, and connection to their culture and community (Hanley & Marchetti, 2020).

Rasmussen et al. (2018) found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals' art program attendance was associated with reduced risk of suicide and self-harm behaviours. The art program was facilitated by a cultural liaison officer and provided space for creation of Aboriginal art in an unstructured, social setting.

### **Incorporating Culture into Correctional Programming**

Positive results were commonly identified when aspects of culture were incorporated into correctional programming.

Tupiq program incorporating Inuit values, language, and the Arctic environment into Cognitive Behavioral therapy demonstrated much higher completion rates than the national sex offenders' program (Stewart et al., 2015).

Incarcerated individuals who identify as Aboriginal found increased cultural knowledge through spirituality programs which helped to resolve identity conflicts and provided meaning and a way to cope (Waldram, 1993).

Increased connection to culture through participation in sweat lodge ceremonies (Gossage et al., 2003).; sweat lodge and sun dance ceremony better enabled community re-integration (Grobsmith & Dam, 1990)

Collaborating with formerly incarcerated Māori individuals when incorporating values and beliefs into programs may facilitate a more effective transition into the community (Nakhid & Shorter, 2014).  
Involve family and community to create culturally competent programs for ATSI people leaving prison (Abbott et al., 2018).  
Creating a link between prison and community-based services (Abbott et al., 2018).  
Use of Indigenous staff and instructors within programs was found to be important (Zellerer, 2003).  
Dreaming inside program, designed by Wadi Wadi elder enhances self-esteem, skills development and connection to culture (Hanley & Marchetti, 2020).

### **Practice Implications:**

Individually tailored reintegration plans are a significant component of successful release (Sullivan et al. (2016).  
It is important that correctional facilities form partnerships with Indigenous community agencies. These partnerships acknowledge the Indigenous value of community, produce positive outcomes, and advise correctional staff on best practices when working with Indigenous individuals (Sullivan et al., 2016).  
Incorporating elements of Indigenous culture into programming is important. Programs that include Elders, the use of sweat lodges, Indigenous art, and Indigenous values are effective ways to integrate culture into programming (Abbott et al., 2018; Gossage et al., 2003; Grobsmith & Dam, 1990; Nakhid & Shorter, 2014; Rasmussen et al., 2018)..  
Culture specific training is valuable for all staff working with incarcerated Indigenous individuals. This training can ensure culturally-safe service delivery (Abbott et al., 2018)..

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The use of an Indigenous specific appraisal tool prompted awareness of culturally specific measures of success and appropriateness.  
Important area for research - Under studied population leading to limited resources for Occupational Therapists.  
Many interventions connected to mental health – important aspect of OT role in correctional settings.  
Gray literature search was not conducted.

Search was not conducted in major Indigenous databases.  
Literature predominantly focused on males.  
No Occupational Therapy specific interventions.

While numerous articles describe interventions that can be used with Indigenous offenders, the literature on occupational therapy specific interventions in this population is very limited. Additional research in this area is required to understand how occupational therapists can best serve the needs of this unique population. The majority of articles included in this review describe interventions for Indigenous men. For this reason, the interventions may not be applicable to Indigenous women who are incarcerated. It is important that future research explores interventions that can be appropriate and effective for use with Indigenous women. Finally, many of the articles included in the review were conducted in Australia or New Zealand. Therefore, further research is required to determine best practice for Indigenous offenders in a Canadian context. It is anticipated that this research will provide valuable information on special considerations and guide intervention approaches when working with Inuit, Metis, and First Nation offenders in federal correctional settings.

### **Future Directions:**

More research is required on occupational therapy interventions for Indigenous individuals in correctional institutions.  
Exploration of interventions that can be used with Indigenous women will be important.  
Further research is required to determine interventions that can be used in a Canadian context.

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