

Culture-Based Correctional Rehabilitative Interventions for Indigenous Offenders

EVIDENCE BRIEF

Culture-based interventions can improve participants' cultural knowledge and sense of identity, and promote positive attitude and behavioural changes. There is currently insufficient evidence to conclude that culture-based interventions reduce re-offending. Further research is needed on when these interventions are most effective and their impact on re-offending.

OVERVIEW

- Over half (51%) of prisoners in New Zealand are Māori.ⁱ Once released from prison, Māori are more likely than Pakeha to be reconvicted. For this reason, targeted correctional rehabilitative programmes (prison-based and community-based) have been prioritised for Māori.
- It is generally accepted that, to reduce reoffending amongst Maori, it is important to be responsive to the needs of Māori offenders, and avoid a “one size fits all” approach.ⁱⁱ
- Culture-based interventions incorporate indigenous cultural concepts and practices to varying extents.
- There is a distinction between culture-based and culturally adapted interventions. Culture-based interventions have a primary focus on cultural learning and identity, while culturally adapted interventions are mainstream therapeutic interventions that have been adapted to better address the cultural needs of indigenous participants.
- International research on culture-based interventions is limited, particularly when it comes to evaluating their effectiveness in reducing reoffending.
- New Zealand evaluations of culture-based programmes have generally shown small and statistically non-significant reductions in reoffending rates. Significant reductions in re-offending have only been achieved by

culturally adapted programmes - Pacific Focus Unit and the Sailsi Matagi programme - for violent Pacifica offenders.

- Research suggests that these interventions are most effective when they are holistic and address multiple risk factors, involve whānau and the wider indigenous community, and use culturally informed personnel.
- Researchers have cautioned against relying on culture itself as an intervention to reduce reoffending.
- Other benefits of culture-based interventions include improving participants' connection to culture and identity promoting pro-social attitudes and behaviours, and motivating offenders to participate in other forms of rehabilitation.
- In order to expand the evidence base, it is necessary to prioritise evaluating culture-based interventions to understand when they are most effective and how their impact on re-offending can be enhanced.

EVIDENCE BRIEF SUMMARY

Investment rating:	Inconclusive
Unit cost:	\$4739
Effect size (number needed to treat):	For every 19 offenders receiving treatment, one fewer will be re-imprisoned.

	For every 30 offenders receiving treatment, one fewer will be reconvicted.
Current spend:	\$6.9m (2015/16)
Unmet demand:	Unknown

WHAT ARE CULTURE-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR INDIGENOUS OFFENDERS?

Culture-based interventions incorporate indigenous cultural concepts and practices into their service design and delivery to varying extents.

Culturally informed interventions vary in the extent to which the cultural content is central to the programme. Most of these programmes combine Western therapeutic approaches with modified content and modes of delivery to be more culturally relevant for indigenous participants (culturally adapted interventions). Other programmes source their design, content, style of delivery and personnel exclusively from the indigenous culture (culture-based interventions).ⁱⁱⁱ This Brief focuses on culture-based interventions with some assessment of culturally adapted interventions.

The extent to which these programmes focus solely on building cultural skills and knowledge or on developing cultural identity as the basis for a non-offending lifestyle also varies.

The central principle of cultural interventions is the expectation that addressing deficits in cultural knowledge and identity will improve personal and social functioning and thereby encourage pro-social behaviour and reduce re-offending.^{iv}

DO CULTURE-BASED INTERVENTIONS REDUCE CRIME?

International evidence

The international research in this area is limited, and the majority of available evidence concerning culture based interventions is from New Zealand. There are examples of culture based interventions for offenders in Australia and Canada, but most of this research has not examined re-offending rates.

A 1999 study focused on the Australian Aboriginal Pre-Release Sex Offender Treatment Programme. This programme adapted a mainstream cognitive-behavioural therapy model to address sex offending behaviour in a culturally-appropriate framework. The programme targeted incarcerated male Aboriginal sex offenders and was delivered in 26 semi-structured facilitated group sessions. The recidivism rate for non-treated offenders was 80% and offenders treated by the programme was 38% (recidivism was defined as breach of parole or a new sexual or violent offence).^v

A 2005 study on the Australian Koori Cognitive Skills Programme involved a cognitive skills therapeutic programme that had been adapted by a Koori registered psychologist. Adaptations included discussions of Aboriginal culture and personal histories, incorporating aboriginal symbols, language, art and culturally relevant activities and real-life scenarios.^{vi} The programme targeted both Koori men and women and involved 30 two-hour sessions. Qualitative interviews found that participants valued the programme and agreed that participation helped them to desist from offending. Quantitative assessments showed mixed results for skills acquisition. Recidivism was not measured.^{vii}

A 2005 study on the Canadian 'In Search of Your Warrior' (ISOYW) programme targeted

indigenous male offenders with a history of violent offending. The programme blends aspects of traditional indigenous spirituality with cognitive behavioural therapy over a 6 to 13-week period. An evaluation which followed 136 programme completers found no significant difference in re-admissions for new offences at a one-year follow-up (13% for ISOWYN participant's vs 11% control). Among those who were re-admitted for a new offence, violent re-offences were less common amongst programme participants (7% vs 57%), although overall numbers in each group were low.^{viii}

A 2006 evaluation assessed the 'Spirit of a Warrior' programme, an adapted version of the ISOYW programme that targeted violent female indigenous offenders. Pre and post programme assessments showed participants levels of anger significantly decreased and their self-esteem and self-control significantly increased. Recidivism was not measured.^{ix}

A 2014 study focused on the Tupiq Programme for Inuit sexual offenders, which combines cognitive-behavioural therapy with traditional Inuit knowledge and cultural practices. The programme involved 290 contact hours over 18 weeks. General, violent and sexual reoffending rates for 61 Tupiq programme participants were compared to 114 Inuit sex offenders who had taken alternative sex offender treatment programmes or had not attended any treatment programme. Lower re-offending rates were found for Tupiq participants on all measures, though only the general re-offending rates (30% vs 47%) were statistically significant.^x

International research concerning mainstream correctional programmes with indigenous and ethnically diverse offenders has found that programmes based upon the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Model^{xi} (the most widely used rehabilitation framework internationally) and using cognitive-behavioural approaches produce significant reductions in recidivism regardless of ethnic status.^{xii}

It is worth noting that the RNR Model incorporates the *specific-responsivity principle*, which states that interventions are most effective when they are responsive to the needs of the individual, including their culture. This highlights the importance of ensuring that correctional interventions are culturally responsive. In this sense, it is crucial that Māori culture continues to be incorporated to some degree within rehabilitation programmes.

New Zealand evidence

Corrections annually reports recidivism quotient scores (percentage point reductions in either reconviction or re-imprisonment) for their main cultural programmes (see table on p.11). These programmes are offered at selected men's prisons and are open to participants of all ethnicities, though in practice over 90% of participants in Māori cultural programmes are Māori.^{xiii}

They include:

- Te Tirohanga (formerly the Māori Focus Units) – five, 60 bed therapeutic community style custodial units that deliver a range of services within a kaupapa Māori framework.
- Mauri Tu Pae (formerly the Māori Therapeutic Programme) – a three-month long group-based rehabilitation programme, delivered in the Te Tirohanga Units.
- Whare Oranga Ake – two re-integration units that provide a kaupapa Māori environment for minimum security prisoners.
- Tikanga Māori programme – low-intensity motivational style programmes that vary between prison sites.
- The Pacific Focus Unit – therapeutic community style custodial unit for Pacific offenders.

- The Saili Matagi programme – a group-based rehabilitation programme delivered in the Pacific Focus Unit for serious and/or violent Pacific offenders.

The majority of these programmes have shown small reductions in reconviction and re-imprisonment when compared with matched control prisoners. Some programmes have shown no effect. The Saili Matagi programme has shown a statistically significant effect in reducing crime – reconviction rates for treated offenders reduced by 7.8%, and re-imprisonment rates reduced by 4%.^{xiv}

Additionally, the Pacific Focus Unit shows a significant reduction in reconviction rates by 5.2% and re-imprisonment rates by 3.5%.^{xv}

Caution should be exercised when reading these results due to some programmes having small sample sizes and incomplete data (e.g. recidivism rates for Whare Oranga Ake are not represented for the year 2012). However, the rough estimates are consistent with the controlled studies in the international literature.

Motivational programmes

The Special Māori Cultural Assessment tool was evaluated in 2007. This optional assessment is intended to have a motivation effect. The assessment is undertaken by independent Māori assessors who gauge the offenders' cultural strengths and needs and provide recommendations for self-directed cultural activities or referrals into other tikanga-based programmes. The 2007 evaluation found that the assessment tool immediately improved offenders' motivation to attend rehabilitative programmes, to learn more about their whakapapa, to strengthen their whānau relationships, and to address their offending. This motivation diminished over time, especially where there was no subsequent participation in culture related interventions.^{xvi}

The Tikanga Māori Programme (TMP) constitutes a culture-based programme - the intended outcome of the programme is not to reduce reoffending, but it could have an effect. Instead, the TMP uses culture to help motivate offenders to engage in other rehabilitative interventions.^{xvii} The 2008 evaluation of TMP employs a kaupapa Māori research approach to measure outcomes of the 22 offender participants.

The evaluation collected data of pre-, post-, and three-month follow-up interviews of the 22 offenders that completed the TMP. Results suggest that the immediate and short term impacts of completing the TMP were positive, for example, offenders gained more knowledge of their whakapapa and tikanga Māori.^{xviii} Results from the three-month follow-up interviews indicate an increase in motivation for the majority of offenders. In particular, offenders were more motivated to be a positive role model for their whanau and learn more about their whakapapa.

The evaluation notes that none of the 22 offenders breached their Probation sentence conditions. This finding is contrasted with the majority of the 13 offenders, who did not complete the TMP, and either went back to prison or breached their conditions. However, this could instead indicate that more serious offenders are both more likely to drop out of the programme and reoffend following the programme.

Readers must exercise caution in reading the findings as it is unknown whether the 22 offender participants registered with other rehabilitative programmes. The findings are further limited when trying to understand effectiveness, since the sample size is relatively small, the evaluation does not measure outcomes pre / post treatment in comparable controlled conditions, and long-term outcomes of the TMP are unknown.

Rehabilitation programmes

A 2003 evaluation focused on the New Life Akoranga programme (NLA), which involves a four-day residential programme within prison, mentoring of inmates before and after release, and the involvement and support of inmates' whānau. Programme benefits included improved relationships with whānau and improved cultural knowledge. No differences in re-conviction or re-imprisonment rates were found for programme participants and a matched sample group at one year post-release.^{xix}

A 2009 evaluation focused on Te Tirohanga (formerly the Māori Focus Units) and one of the main services offered through these units, Mauri Tu Pae (formerly the Māori Therapeutic Programme). The evaluation found small reductions in rates of reconviction and re-imprisonment, though these were not statistically significant. The evaluation identified other benefits of the interventions such as enhanced cultural knowledge, a strengthened sense of cultural identity and positive attitude changes in relation to criminal lifestyles.^{xx}

The Saili Matagi programme was evaluated in 2011. The programme is considered a culturally adaptive intervention - it utilises both Pacific cultural values and concepts and cognitive behavioural therapy techniques. Prison staff observed that offenders had improved self-control; used polite and positive language, experienced more positive interactions and communication with others, exhibited reduced aggression and showed an increased willingness to take responsibility for their actions.^{xxi}

Reintegration programmes

Whare Oranga Ake is a culture-based reintegration programme which focuses on culture, identity and addressing re-integrative needs particularly employment, accommodation and whānau relationships.^{xxii} The programme's

intended outcome is to reduce reoffending, and targets Māori offenders, but is open to all prisoners who meet the eligibility criteria. The aim of addressing reintegration needs and strengthening cultural identity is expected to reduce reoffending.

There is significant emphasis on reintegration services for these prisoners, by giving them skills and establishing positive connections that will support them on release and through their lives. The programme has resulted in small reductions in rates of reconviction and re-imprisonment, however these were not statistically significant.

WHEN ARE CULTURE-BASED PROGRAMMES MOST EFFECTIVE?

Effectiveness of culture-based interventions may be explained by social control theory,^{xxiii} which considers that individuals are less likely to offend when they have a stronger connection with society.^{xxiv} It can be hypothesised that offenders are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour because culture-based interventions aim to improve their societal connection.

The effectiveness of culture-based programmes has typically been measured through the development of cultural knowledge and identity, attitudinal and behavioural changes, relationships with whānau and indigenous communities and re-offending related measures.^{xxv}

Research has highlighted that best practice culture based programmes should:

- Use a holistic approach and address multiple risk factors.^{xxvi}
- Be delivered through group-style processes and cater to visual and verbal learning styles (rather than extensively relying on written material).^{xxvii}

- Use staff who are culturally informed and ideally from the same indigenous groups as programme participants.^{xxviii}
- Incentivise prison staff to support culture-based interventions as this improves programme effectiveness.^{xxix}
- Involve whānau and the wider indigenous community in programme design and implementation.^{xxx}
- Focus on the real-life experiences of participants and teach them how cultural values can be applied to their everyday lives.^{xxxi}
- Be followed by community support services.^{xxxii} Evaluations have raised concerns about a lack of aftercare for offenders.^{xxxiii}

Engagement and drop out

Evaluations have noted high turnover rates within Māori focus units and programmes – due in part to prisoner drop out alongside prison and unit transfers -- are likely to affect the therapeutic climate within these units. The effect of dropping out of programmes may extend to remaining participants, as well as the individual who exits the intervention.^{xxxiv}

Addressing need

Available evidence suggests that programmes based on cultural principles and content are most effective when they also address the risk factors surrounding offending.^{xxxv} For example, if a programme aims to enhance cultural identity while also directly challenging offence-supportive attitudes and replacing anti-social associates with social networks that do not tolerate crime. This highlights the need for a holistic approach that involves connection with whānau and wider social networks, as well as individual factors.

The hybrid nature of programmes in New Zealand means that it is difficult to ascertain

whether the cultural components of these programmes impact participants, or whether cultural learning and identity are best thought of as responsivity factors or motivators. In some cases, cultural development may directly target risk, for example where a participant reconnects with pro-social whānau or where cultural identity is incompatible with an offending lifestyle.^{xxxvi}

However, researchers have warned against relying on culture itself as an intervention to reduce reoffending.^{xxxvii}

Future research should aim to provide evidence on when culture-based interventions are most effective. For example, in a prison versus community setting, and delivered by Corrections staff or external indigenous providers. Further research is also necessary to ascertain which aspects of culture-based interventions have the most impact on re-offending.^{xxxviii}

WHAT OTHER BENEFITS DO CULTURE-BASED INTERVENTIONS HAVE?

The benefits of culture-based interventions are most evident in participants' cultural learning and attitudinal or behavioural changes.

The key findings from staff observations and participant evaluations (self-report and psychometric testing) include:

- Improved cultural knowledge and cultural identity development.^{xxxix}
- Improved pro-social attitudes towards crime.^{xl}
- Improved relationship skills.^{xli}
- Decreased anger or aggression.^{xlii}
- Expectations that the programme would help them avoid reoffending.^{xliii}
- Reduced rehabilitative needs.^{xliv}

- Motivation to participate in other rehabilitation activities.^{xlv}

These benefits were generally measured or observed while participants were in prison; there is little evidence of whether these benefits are maintained post-programme or influence their long-term relationship with re-offending.^{xlvi}

International research concerning the use of culture-based interventions and cultural identity in the treatment of addiction has also shown promising results.^{xlvii} A 1999 study on the Australian Goorie intervention programme assessed a culturally informed alcohol and drug treatment programme delivered to sixteen Aboriginal offenders over a year long period. Significant reductions were found in self-reported alcohol consumption, with the average daily consumption reducing from 5.5 to 0.9 standard drinks.^{xlviii}

CURRENT INVESTMENT IN NEW ZEALAND

The Department of Corrections provides a range of culture-based interventions, both in prison and the community. Total investment is about \$6.9 million per year.

EVIDENCE RATING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Each Evidence Brief provides an evidence rating between Harmful and Strong.

Harmful	Robust evidence that intervention increases crime
Poor	Robust evidence that intervention tends to have no effect
Inconclusive	Conflicting evidence that intervention can reduce crime

Fair	Some evidence that intervention can reduce crime
Promising	Robust international <i>or</i> local evidence that intervention tends to reduce crime
Strong	Robust international <i>and</i> local evidence that intervention tends to reduce crime

According to the standard criteria for all Evidence Briefs¹, the appropriate evidence rating for Culture-Based Interventions is Inconclusive.

As per the standard definitions of evidence strength outlined in our methodology, the interpretation of this evidence rating is that:

- there is conflicting evidence that interventions can reduce crime
- it is highly uncertain whether the investment will generate return even if implemented well

Culture-based interventions paired with empirically supported therapeutic treatments that can reduce risk (culturally adaptive interventions) are likely to have positive outcomes in terms of reducing crime.

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¹ Available at www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector/what-works-to-reduce-crime/

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Citations

Recommended reading

ⁱ Department of Corrections, (2017b)
ⁱⁱ Nathan, Kaire & McLaren, (2008).
ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Corrections, (2017a)
^{iv} Department of Corrections, (2017a).
^v Davies, (1999); Camman et al, (2011).
^{vi} Atkinson & Jones, (2005).
^{vii} Atkinson & Jones, (2005).
^{viii} Trevethan et al, (2005).
^{ix} Bell & Flight, (2006).
^x Stewart et al, (2014).
^{xi} Andrews & Bonta, (2010).
^{xii} Usher & Stewart, (2014); Day et al, (2003)
^{xiii} Department of Corrections, (2017a).
^{xiv} Department of Corrections, (2017).
^{xv} Department of Corrections, (2017).
^{xvi} Kāhui Tautoko Consulting, (2007).
^{xvii} Department of Corrections, (2008).
^{xviii} Department of Corrections, (2008).
^{xix} Wehipeihana et al, (2003).
^{xx} Department of Corrections, (2009).
^{xxi} Apa, (2011).
^{xxii} Department of Corrections, (2015).
^{xxiii} Piehl, (1998).
^{xxiv} Sampson and Laub, (1993).
^{xxv} Singh & White, (2000)
^{xxvi} Singh & White, (2000); Jones (2001); Morrison, (2009); Department of Corrections, (2017a).
^{xxvii} Singh & White, (2000); Atkinson & Jones, (2005); Apa, (2011); Department of Corrections, (2017a).
^{xxviii} Singh & White, (2000); Jones, (2001); Apa, (2011); Camman et al, (2011); Department of Corrections, (2017a).
^{xxix} Atkinson & Jones, (2005); Kāhui Tautoko Consulting, (2007); Apa, (2011).

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^{xxxi} Singh & White (2000); Mihaere, (2015); Department of Corrections, (2017a).
^{xxxii} Singh & White, (2000); Jones (2001); Apa, (2007); Department of Corrections (2017a).
^{xxxiii} Atkinson & Jones, (2005); Trevethan et al, (2005); Department of Corrections, (2008).
^{xxxiv} Department of Corrections, (2009)
^{xxxv} Singh & White, (2000); Jones, (2001); Morrison, (2009).
^{xxxvi} Richards et al; (2011); Singh & White (2000); Nathan and McLaren (2008).
^{xxxvii} Mihaere, (2015).
^{xxxviii} Thakker, (2014)
^{xxxix} Wehipeihana et al, (2003); Kāhui Tautoko Consulting, (2007); Department of Corrections, (2008); Department of Corrections, (2009); Chalmers, (2014).
^{xl} Trevethan et al, (2005); Department of Corrections, (2009); Chalmers (2014)
^{xli} Wehipeihana et al, (2003); Trevethan et al, (2005), Apa, (2011)
^{xlii} Bell & Flight, (2006); Apa, (2011).
^{xliii} Atkinson & Jones, (2005); Department of Corrections, (2009).
^{xliiv} Trevethan et al, (2005).
^{xlv} Trevethan et al, (2005); Kāhui Tautoko Consulting, (2007); Department of Corrections, (2009)
^{xlvi} Department of Corrections, (2017a).
^{xlvii} Brady (1995); Brown et al, (1999) Spicer (2001).
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SUMMARY OF RQ EFFECT SIZES FROM DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS ANNUAL REPORTS^{xlix}

RQ effect sizes are reported as percentage-point reductions in either reconviction or re-imprisonments within 12 months of release (for prison programmes,) or within 12 months of a programme end date (for community-managed offenders).

Programme	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Reconv	Re-imp										
Prison												
Māori Therapeutic Prog	-3.1%	1.0%	-4.6%	-3.5%	-4.7%	-1.4%	6.0%	-3.5%	-3.1%	-2.1%	-2.1%	-2.4%
Māori Focus Unit	8.7%	-0.1%	5.1%	2.9%	-5.3%	-1.9%	2.9%	-3.2%	2.6%	-3.3%	1.3%	-4.1%
Tikanga Māori Prog	-0.4%	-3.1%	-4.9%	-1.5%	0.02%	-0.4%	na	na	na	na	-0.1%	2.1%
Pacific Focus Unit**	na	na	na	na	na	na	4.1%	-0.7%	-8.8%	-2.6%	-5.2%*	-3.5%*
Saili Matagi Prog***	na	-7.8%*	-4.0%*									
Whare Oranga Ake****	na	-6.1%	-3.4%									
Community												
Tikanga Māori Prog	-0.5%	na	-2.8%	na	2.5%	na	1.4%	-3.7%	5.0%	1.1%	2.6%	-2.7%

Table 1: Rehabilitation Quotient (RQ) effect sizes for New Zealand cultural interventions, 2010-2015

* statistically significant $p < 0.05$

** three years of participant data were combined for the Pacific Focus Unit analysis

*** five years of participant data (2010-2015) were combined for the 2015 Saili Matagi analysis

**** three years of participant were combined for the 2015 Whare Oranga Ake analysis

^{xlix} Department of Corrections, (2017a).