

Cultural engagement lowers reoffending rate

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The study examined 122 adults across 11 prisons in Victoria. Credit: Swinburne University of Technology

Access to cultural programs for Indigenous prisoners decreases their chance of reoffending, a study by Swinburne researchers has found.

The study, 'The impact of indigenous cultural identity and cultural engagement on violent offending', led by Swinburne and published by

BMC Public Health, examined 122 adults from 11 prisons in Victoria and followed participants two years after their release from custody.

The results show there is a clear relationship between cultural engagement and reduced violent reoffending, says Swinburne Senior Lecturer, Dr Stephane Shepherd of the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science.

"Being connected to culture through regular engagement in a meaningful activity while in custody, provides a sense of routine, stability, improved self-esteem, life purpose and social support."

Cultural engagement in relation to the study is defined as:

- Participation in [cultural activities](#) and events
- Connection to culture
- Connection to homeland/traditional country

"In other words, 'engagement' was the actual practising of 'identity'," says Dr Shepherd.

"This can obviously provide an individual with purpose, motivation and support, which are stabilising influences that they may not have possessed before entering custody."

The findings emphasise the importance of culture for Indigenous people in [custody](#) and a greater need for correctional institutions to accommodate Indigenous cultural considerations.

Dr Shepherd recommends cultural activities be included as part of a holistic rehabilitation.

"Cultural activities should be one component of holistic care for

Indigenous prisoners – either as a part of rehabilitation itself or alongside other therapeutic efforts to address offending behaviours."

More information: Stephane M. Shepherd et al. The impact of indigenous cultural identity and cultural engagement on violent offending, *BMC Public Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-017-4603-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-017-4603-2)

Provided by Swinburne University of Technology

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