

Access to programs and services among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) offenders: The case of EQUIPS

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AIM

To explore whether Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) offenders experienced different referral and participation outcomes for the EQUIPS suite of behaviour change programs delivered by Corrective Services NSW, compared to non-CALD offenders.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

One in five (7841 / 38654; 20.3%) of offenders in the study sample were recorded as having a CALD background. CALD offenders identified with a wide range of cultures, countries of birth and languages spoken as their first language, most commonly associated with a Lebanese, Vietnamese, Chinese, Samoan or Fijian cultural background.

CALD offenders were significantly less likely to be referred to any EQUIPS programs than non-CALD offenders, both before and after controlling for a number of eligibility and other factors that may influence access to programs. CALD status was not significantly associated with likelihood of commencing an EQUIPS program after being referred, or likelihood of completing an EQUIPS program after starting. These findings were consistent for EQUIPS activity in custody and in the community, suggesting that CALD status did not interact with contextual influences on program access and participation. A similar pattern of results emerged after adjusting for allocation of Indigenous Australian offenders to the non-CALD group.

We concluded that at the population level, CALD offenders may differ in sentencing and criminogenic characteristics that confer eligibility for EQUIPS programs when compared to non-CALD offenders. However, there was no evidence that CALD status consistently reflects responsivity factors that affect (perceived or actual) suitability for programs, or engagement in programs. We recognise that this may be related to the broad definition of CALD offenders used by Corrective Services NSW, and there may be subgroups of offenders who experience substantial challenges to program access and participation associated with their cultural background or linguistic diversity.

INTRODUCTION

Australia is a multicultural society, and this extends to individuals who come into contact with the criminal justice system. In New South Wales (NSW), 20.4% of the prison population were recorded as being born overseas and 15.9% came from a non-English speaking country of birth in the 2017/18 financial year (Corben & Tang, 2018). Similar proportions of offenders supervised in the community, either as part of a community-based sentence or while on parole, have also been identified as having cultural and ethnic backgrounds other than Australian (van Doorn & Jayawardena, 2013).

Corrective Services routinely identifies whether offenders have a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background to help support their management needs. While some definitions of CALD focus on non-English speaking background (e.g. Shepherd, 2015), Corrective Services NSW adopts a relatively inclusive definition and identifies offenders as having a CALD background if they meet any of these criteria:

- They were born overseas
- They speak a language other than English as their first language
- They identify as having a cultural background other than Australian

In the community, individuals with CALD backgrounds can face a number of barriers to accessing services and programs. These can include cultural barriers (beliefs and cultural norms that affect help-seeking behaviours), structural barriers (factors that prevent CALD individuals from understanding or becoming aware of available services), and service-related barriers (service delivery factors that are culturally insensitive or otherwise deter engagement for CALD individuals: Bartels, 2011; Sawrikar & Katz, 2008).

Prominent models of correctional intervention identify similar issues that may influence delivery of programs to CALD offenders to address their risk factors for offending and future likelihood of reoffending. The risk need responsivity (RNR: Andrews & Bonta, 2010) model states that interventions should be matched in intensity to the offender's risk of reoffending (risk); address known factors that have a causal link to their offending behaviours (need); and be delivered in a manner that best promotes change for the individual offender. Factors such as communication barriers and the cultural appropriateness of program content and therapists may be important responsivity issues that influence engagement with, and the effectiveness of, interventions for CALD offenders.

There has been little direct study on the experiences of CALD offenders in the criminal justice context. Available research suggests that while in custody, CALD offenders are more likely to experience isolation and lack an understanding of prison rules and available services compared to non-CALD offenders. CALD women in particular have been found to have limited access to interpreters, which may impact their ability to access and participate in programs (Centre for the Human Rights of Imprisoned People, 2010).

AIMS

This study aimed to examine whether offenders' CALD status has a relationship with their access to and engagement in programs and services delivered by Corrective Services NSW. To achieve this we used the example of the EQUIPS suite of programs, and differences in CALD and non-CALD offenders' patterns of referral to, participation in and completion of these programs.

EQUIPS is a series of behaviour change programs delivered to groups of offenders to address risk factors associated with general offending (EQUIPS Foundation), intimate partner violence (EQUIPS Domestic Abuse) and other violence (EQUIPS Aggression), as well as criminogenic features of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use (EQUIPS Addiction). EQUIPS is a frontline Corrective Services NSW strategy for reducing offenders' likelihood of reoffending and is widely available to offenders in custody and supervised in the community (for more information see Zhang et al., 2019).

We expected that contextual and process factors that influence how offenders access and engage in EQUIPS programs may differ in custody compared to the community. We therefore sought to examine contextual variability in the association between CALD status and EQUIPS access for offenders while serving components of their sentence in custody or in the community.

An additional aim of the study was to explore the potential role of linguistic diversity as a modulating factor in relationships between CALD status and EQUIPS participation outcomes. This was intended to assess whether instrumental factors relating to effective communication with offenders throughout EQUIPS participation pathways explained any observed barriers to access or engagement in the programs.

METHODS

The sample for this study included all offenders who commenced sentences in custody or the community from the time EQUIPS programs were implemented in January 2015. To be included in the study offenders also needed to have completed their corrections episode by December 2018. Offenders who had more than one sentence over this timeframe had only their first corrections episode included. This derived a total sample of 38,654 offenders.

Data for this study were extracted from the Corrective Services NSW Offender Integrated Management System (OIMS). Relevant variables included indicators of CALD status in addition to other demographics, sentence episode details and records of referral to and participation in each of the EQUIPS programs.

Key outcome variables of interest included whether offenders were referred to any EQUIPS program; commenced any EQUIPS program; and completed any EQUIPS program. Analyses of these outcomes used different samples in line with the steps of the participation process, so that likelihood of commencing EQUIPS was examined among offenders who had been referred to one or more programs, and likelihood of completing EQUIPS was examined among offenders who had commenced one or more programs.

Gross differences in these outcomes across CALD and non-CALD offender groups were of interest and examined at the descriptive level. However, we also aimed to assess whether CALD status was associated with EQUIPS participation outcomes after accounting for other factors that may systematically differ across groups and have an influence on outcomes. To do this we conducted a series of binary logistic regression models, where CALD status was entered as a predictor variable along with multiple covariates that we expected would be associated with differences in access to and participation in EQUIPS. These included:

- Gender *EQUIPS programs are delivered to males and females in different groups; in some cases this is necessary due to housing in different prisons. Availability and delivery models for EQUIPS programs may therefore differ for men and women.*
- Risk of reoffending *Offenders are required to have a medium or higher risk of reoffending to participate in EQUIPS. Risk may also influence how offenders are prioritised for programs. General risk of reoffending*

was assessed using the Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI–R: Andrews & Bonta, 1995).

- Index violent offence *Two of the four EQUIPS programs are only available to offenders with index violent or domestic violence offences. This affects opportunities for access to EQUIPS as well as the specific availability and delivery features of the individual programs offenders are referred to.*
- Severity of AOD needs *EQUIPS Addiction is only available to offenders with an LSI–R AOD domain score of 5 or higher. This affects opportunities for access to EQUIPS as well as the specific availability and delivery features of the individual programs offenders are referred to.*
- Episode duration *Offenders with longer episodes have extended opportunities to engage in programs. Offenders are required to have a minimum sentence length (e.g. 6 months or more in custody) to be considered eligible for EQUIPS.*
- Parole *Offenders who have a custody–based sentence and are then released to parole have different case management systems compared to those supervised in custody or in the community alone, which may influence access to and prioritisation for EQUIPS.*
- Number of EQUIPS referrals *Offenders who receive more referrals have greater opportunities to participate and alternative options if availability of any given EQUIPS program is limited.*

Separate regression models were conducted for program activity that occurred while offenders were in custody or under supervision in the community. Models were also conducted for program activity across the entirety of offenders’ corrections episodes, taking into account both custody and / or community episodes. The episode duration covariate was adjusted in each model to reflect time served in custody, under community supervision, or both in the case of custody followed by parole.

FINDINGS

Characteristics of CALD offenders

One in five (7841/38654; 20.3%) offenders in the study sample were recorded as having a CALD background. CALD offenders were relatively more likely to have a custodial sentence only (1699/6214; 27.3%) compared to a community–based order only (5347/27607; 19.4%) or to complete a custody–based episode before being released onto parole (795/4833; 16.4%).

All CALD offenders in the sample identified as having a cultural background other than Australian. They identified with a total of 118 different cultural backgrounds. They most commonly identified having a Lebanese (11.9%), Vietnamese (7.9%), Chinese (5.5%), Samoan (4.8%) or Fijian (4.2%) cultural background.

CALD offenders most commonly reported being born in Australia (31.5%) or had an unrecorded or unknown country of birth (14.9%). Of those CALD offenders who were known to be born overseas, the most common countries of birth were Vietnam (5.8%), New Zealand (4.9%), Lebanon (3.5%), Fiji (3.2%) and China (2.9%).

CALD offenders reported speaking a total of 93 languages as their first language, including English. For offenders with complete records on first language spoken, the most common were English (51.4%) followed by Arabic (8.1%), Vietnamese (5.9%), Chinese languages including Mandarin and Cantonese (4.3%), Samoan (1.4%) and Spanish (1.4%).

Table 1 gives descriptive statistics for demographic and offending-related characteristics of CALD and non-CALD offenders. It can be seen that when compared to non-CALD offenders, CALD offenders were more likely to be male; served slightly longer total corrections episodes; were less likely to be convicted of an index violent offence; had a lower overall risk of reoffending as assessed by the LSI-R; and were less likely to have AOD-related criminogenic needs.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (M/SD or %) for demographic and offending-related characteristics of CALD and non-CALD offenders in the sample.

Variable	CALD	Non-CALD
Age	34.9 (10.1)	34.1 (9.74)
Gender (% female)	10.1%	17.2%
Episode duration	318.0 (293.3)	275.9 (237.5)
Index violent offence (%)	35.2%	41.7%
Parole (%)	10.1%	13.1%
LSI-R total score	19.5 (9.4)	24.8 (9.3)
LSI-R AOD need (%)	38.3%	58.2%

Is CALD status associated with referral to EQUIPS programs?

In general¹, offenders are referred to EQUIPS on the basis of key eligibility criteria such as having a medium or higher assessed risk of reoffending and minimum time remaining on their sentence to complete programs. Other referral criteria are specific to certain programs, such as having an index violent (EQUIPS Aggression) or intimate partner violence (EQUIPS Domestic Abuse) offence, or severe AOD-related needs (EQUIPS Addiction). Associations between CALD status and EQUIPS referrals may indicate differences in the extent that CALD and non-CALD offenders' characteristics confer eligibility for EQUIPS programs.

In the study sample, slightly more than one in five (8712/38654; 22.5%) offenders were referred to one or more EQUIPS programs. Before adjusting for covariates that may influence eligibility, CALD offenders were less commonly referred to EQUIPS (15.0%) compared to non-CALD offenders (24.5%).

Table 2 shows the results of regression models that test multiple predictors of being referred to EQUIPS, including in custody, in the community, and for offenders' corrections episode overall. After adjusting for other influences on referral, CALD offenders were significantly less likely to be referred to EQUIPS than non-CALD offenders². This was consistent for referrals occurring in custody and in the community, as well as over the entirety of offenders' corrections episodes.

¹ Referrals to EQUIPS follow slightly different procedures when made in custody or in the community. Custody-based referrals are based on standard eligibility criteria that are assessed through automated data outputs. Community-based referrals occur during the case planning process and can take into account case managers' discretion about the offender's suitability and logistics factors, in addition to standard eligibility criteria.

² Odds ratios (OR) can be interpreted so that an OR < 1 means an increase in that factor is associated with lower odds of an outcome, and OR > 1 means an increase in that factor is associated with higher odds of an outcome.

Table 2. Predictors of any referral to EQUIPS programs during offenders' community episodes, custody episodes, and corrections episodes overall.

Variable	Community		Custody		Total	
	OR	[95% C.I.]	OR	[95% C.I.]	OR	[95% C.I.]
CALD	.79***	[.71-.88]	.83**	[.73-.95]	.81***	[.74-.88]
LSI-R total	1.13***	[1.13-1.14]	1.07***	[1.06-1.08]	1.11***	[1.10-1.12]
Female	.58***	[.52-.64]	.87	[.73-1.04]	.64***	[.58-.70]
Parole	.20***	[.18-.23]	1.16*	[1.03-1.31]	.95	[.87-1.04]
LSI-R AOD need	1.14**	[1.04-1.24]	2.30***	[1.98-2.66]	1.37***	[1.27-1.49]
Index violent offence	1.89***	[1.76-2.03]	1.53***	[1.38-1.70]	1.82***	[1.72-1.94]
Episode duration	1.003***	[1.003-1.003]	1.002***	[1.002-1.003]	1.003***	[1.002-1.003]

Notes: OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.005.

Is CALD status associated with participating in EQUIPS programs?

Once an offender is referred to EQUIPS, multiple factors can have a bearing on whether they ultimately commence a program. Offenders are often required to undergo additional suitability assessments, which consider the impact of mental health, cognitive functioning, and other responsivity factors on their participation. There are also logistics challenges associated with allocating offenders to specific programs, taking into account their location, sentence duration and other circumstances. Offenders are required to remain engaged throughout these processes, and there is a risk they may refuse to participate. Associations between CALD status and participation could indicate different barriers to being found suitable and navigating the program entry process for CALD and non-CALD offenders.

Among those offenders who received one or more referrals to EQUIPS programs, around half (4581/8712; 52.6%) participated in one or more programs over the course of their corrections episode. Referrals were converted into program commencements at a slightly higher rate for CALD offenders (57.2%) than for non-CALD offenders (51.9%).

Table 3 shows the results of regression models testing CALD status as a predictor of participation in any EQUIPS program following referral while the offender was in custody, in the community, and over their corrections episode overall. After adjusting for other sources of variance, CALD offenders who were referred to EQUIPS programs were not significantly more or less likely to commence a program compared to non-CALD offenders in any of the models.

Table 3. Predictors of any participation in EQUIPS programs during offenders' community episodes, custody episodes, and corrections episodes overall.

Variable	Community		Custody		Total	
	OR	[95% C.I.]	OR	[95% C.I.]	OR	[95% C.I.]
CALD	1.12	[.92-1.36]	.97	[.79-1.18]	1.03	[.89-1.18]
LSI-R total	1.00	[.99-1.01]	.99	[.98-1.00]	.99	[.99-1.01]
Female	.67***	[.56-.80]	.94	[.71-1.24]	.75***	[.65-.87]
Parole	1.26*	[1.01-1.57]	.87	[.72-1.05]	1.10	[.97-1.23]
LSI-R AOD need	1.11	[.95-1.28]	1.28*	[1.02-1.60]	1.16*	[1.02-1.31]
Index violent offence	1.37***	[1.21-1.55]	.96	[.82-1.13]	1.28***	[1.17-1.41]
Episode duration	1.003***	[1.003-1.003]	1.001***	[1.001-1.002]	1.002***	[1.002-1.002]
Number referrals	1.18***	[1.08-1.28]	1.43***	[1.31-1.56]	1.23***	[1.22-1.37]

Notes: OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.005.

Is CALD status associated with completing EQUIPS programs?

A critical goal of offender programs is to maintain eligible and suitable offenders' participation until they complete the full schedule of intervention. Offenders' premature drop out or discharge from a program is often related to responsivity issues, where program content or structure is not well aligned with the individual offender's needs or does not promote their engagement (e.g. Beyko & Wong, 2005). Associations between CALD status and program completion could indicate differences in how EQUIPS accommodates responsivity issues for CALD and non-CALD offenders.

The rate of program completion among offenders who started EQUIPS programs was relatively high, with two-thirds of participants being recorded as completing at least one program (3110/4581; 67.8%). Completion rates were similar for CALD (70.1%) and non-CALD (67.4%) offenders.

Table 4 shows the results of regression models for completion of any EQUIPS program among offenders who started one or more programs. Similar to the participation results, CALD status was not significantly associated with offenders' likelihood of EQUIPS program completion while in custody, in the community, and over the course of their corrections episodes overall.

Table 4. Predictors of any EQUIPS program completion during offenders' community episodes, custody episodes, and corrections episodes overall.

Variable	Community		Custody		Total	
	OR	[95% C.I.]	OR	[95% C.I.]	OR	[95% C.I.]
CALD	.90	[.69–1.16]	.82	[.59–1.13]	.87	[.71–1.06]
LSI-R total	.93***	[.92–.95]	.98	[.97–1.01]	.96***	[.95–.97]
Female	.65***	[.50–.84]	.76	[.48–1.18]	.63***	[.50–.78]
Parole	1.01	[.80–1.27]	.97	[.71–1.32]	.88	[.75–1.03]
LSI-R AOD need	1.22	[.98–1.50]	1.06	[.73–1.54]	1.17	[.98–1.41]
Index violent offence	1.14	[.87–1.35]	1.02***	[.79–1.32]	.99	[.87–1.15]
Episode duration	1.002***	[1.001–1.002]	1.001***	[1.001–1.002]	1.002***	[1.001–1.002]
Number referrals	.96	[.87–1.06]	1.33	[1.16–1.51]	1.22***	[1.13–1.31]

Notes: OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .005$.

Cultural diversity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders

Analyses of the Corrective Services NSW operational definition of CALD may not fully take into account the effects of cultural diversity on access to and participation in EQUIPS programs. This is because Indigenous Australian offenders are defined for these purposes as non-CALD. Indigenous Australian offenders are recognised as having rich cultural diversity; they also encounter multiple challenges to accessing services and programs, many of which are related to their unique cultural backgrounds and experiences (e.g. Day, Howell, & Casey, 2003; Halacas & Adams, 2015). The following section attempts to provide a more sensitive analysis of the relationship between CALD status and EQUIPS outcomes by adjusting for Indigenous Australian offender's membership in the non-CALD group.

To adjust for the potential confounding influence of Indigenous status on EQUIPS outcomes, we replicated the above multivariable regression models for likelihood of referral to EQUIPS, participation in EQUIPS, and completion of EQUIPS. In addition to the previous covariates, we also added Indigenous status as a predictor in each model. This approach was intended to allow us to examine the association between CALD status and outcomes while holding constant the association between Indigenous status and outcomes. In the interests of brevity, and given previous indications that results did not differ across

custodial and community settings, we only replicated models for each outcome across the entirety of offenders' corrections episodes.

Table 5 shows the results of regression models for EQUIPS referral, participation and completion after adding Indigenous status as a covariate. Similar to the primary analyses, CALD offenders had a significantly lower likelihood of receiving any referrals to EQUIPS compared to non-CALD offenders, after adjusting for Indigenous status and other covariates. CALD status was not a significant predictor of commencing EQUIPS among those offenders who received one or more referrals. CALD offenders who started EQUIPS were marginally less likely to complete a program ($p = .058$) than non-CALD offenders after adjusting for other covariates; however this trend was not statistically significant.

Examination of model coefficients for the Indigenous status predictor variable also gave indications about access to and participation in EQUIPS among Indigenous Australian offenders, after accounting for other influences. Results indicated that Indigenous status was not associated with likelihood of being referred to EQUIPS. Indigenous Australian offenders were significantly less likely to commence an EQUIPS program after being referred, and significantly less likely to complete an EQUIPS program they had commenced, compared to non-Indigenous offenders.

Table 5. Predictors of EQUIPS referral, EQUIPS participation, and EQUIPS completion during offenders' corrections episodes, following inclusion of Indigenous status.

Variable	Referral		Participation		Completion	
	OR	[95% C.I.]	OR	[95% C.I.]	OR	[95% C.I.]
CALD	.82***	[.75-.89]	.99	[.86-1.15]	.82	[.67-1.01]
Indigenous	1.05	[.98-1.13]	.89*	[.80-.99]	.82*	[.71-.96]
LSI-R total	1.11***	[1.11-1.12]	.99	[.99-1.01]	.96***	[.95-.97]
Female	.64***	[.58-.70]	.75***	[.65-.87]	.63***	[.51-.79]
Parole	.95	[.87-1.04]	1.10	[.97-1.24]	.89	[.76-1.04]
LSI-R AOD need	1.38***	[1.27-1.49]	1.15*	[1.02-1.31]	1.18	[.98-1.41]
Index violent offence	1.82***	[1.71-1.93]	1.30***	[1.18-1.43]	1.01	[.87-1.16]
Episode duration	1.003***	[1.002-1.003]	1.002***	[1.002-1.002]	1.002***	[1.001-1.002]
Number referrals	-	-	1.30***	[1.22-1.38]	1.22***	[1.14-1.31]

Notes: OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .005$.

The role of linguistic differences

As implied by the nomenclature, there are two broad domains of difference between CALD and non-CALD offenders which may influence their access to and engagement in EQUIPS programs. One relates to cultural diversity, or how program content and delivery is aligned with offenders' cultural norms and perspectives. Another relates to linguistic diversity, or the extent to which programs are administered and delivered in a way that accommodates offenders who speak different languages or have varying proficiency in English language and literacy. An aim of this study was to explore how linguistic factors could explain differences in EQUIPS participation outcomes between CALD and non-CALD offenders.

To explore the role of linguistic factors on EQUIPS participation outcomes, we utilised assessment data on offenders' English literacy (reading and writing) levels. All offenders who receive a custodial sentence of three or more months' duration are eligible for education and vocational programs, and undergo an education intake screening to assess core skills such as numeracy, literacy and oracy. While different sets

of core skills are assessed according to whether the offender has English as their first language, screening commonly includes measures of proficiency in reading and writing in English.

Education intake assessments are aligned with the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). Reading and writing core skills assessments are scored on a scale of increasing proficiency from 1 to 5. Offenders who are scored at levels 1–2 on either measure are prioritised for education programs. Conversely, most Corrective Services NSW behaviour change programs are considered to require literacy levels of 3 or higher to fully participate in the program. However, offenders with lower literacy levels should not be necessarily excluded from programs such as EQUIPS; instead, facilitators are encouraged to address low literacy in programs as a responsiveness factor or concurrently engage education and other resources to support the offender.

Data on reading and writing assessment results were limited for the purposes of this study. Only a relatively small subset of offenders had full records of the assessment results available, including custody-based offenders who had been referred to EQUIPS (n = 3493). Due to small sample sizes in some groups, as well as the potential risk of selection effects, we were unable to incorporate reading and writing proficiency data in full inferential models of EQUIPS participation outcomes. We therefore limited analysis to a descriptive comparison of assessment outcomes across groups relevant to CALD status.

Table 6 shows the proportion of CALD and non-CALD offenders who were assessed as having needs³ related to proficiency in reading and writing. In line with previous analyses, results for non-CALD offenders are given for Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders as well as for the group in total.

CALD offenders were slightly less likely to have needs in reading and writing proficiency compared to non-CALD offenders. This appears to be related to the inclusion of Indigenous Australian offenders in the non-CALD group. Indigenous Australian offenders had a considerably higher rate of reading and writing needs compared to both CALD offenders and non-CALD / non-Indigenous offenders. Differences in literacy needs between CALD and non-CALD / non-Indigenous offenders were minor and inconsistent, with CALD offenders showing a slightly lower prevalence of writing needs and a higher prevalence of reading needs.

Table 6. Proportions of offenders who had needs in domains of writing proficiency and reading proficiency as assessed during education intake screening.

Measure	CALD	Non-CALD		
	Total	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total
Writing need (%)	70.0%	87.0%	72.8%	78.5%
Reading need (%)	32.0%	46.3%	27.0%	34.4%

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore whether offenders' CALD status was associated with differences in their access to services and programs. To achieve this we used the example of referrals to and participation in the EQUIPS suite of behaviour change programs, as delivered by Corrective Services NSW in custody and community settings.

³ Defined as results in ranks 1 or 2 for each of the assessments of interest.

We found that in terms of gross program activity, CALD offenders were less likely to receive any referrals to EQUIPS programs compared to non-CALD offenders. This can be partly attributable to indications that CALD offenders were less likely to meet standard eligibility criteria for EQUIPS programs. For example, CALD offenders had lower average assessed risk of reoffending, and less frequently had severe AOD needs or index violent offences, compared to non-CALD offenders. While this suggests that eligibility criteria for EQUIPS may be systematically reducing opportunities for access among CALD offenders, use of risk- and need-related criteria to determine eligibility for behaviour change programs is consistent with best practice in correctional interventions (e.g. Andrews & Bonta, 2010). However, the results indicate that further examination of early eligibility-related and other barriers to program access for CALD offenders is warranted.

After adjusting for multiple eligibility factors, we found that CALD offenders continued to be less likely to be referred to EQUIPS. In the community context, this may suggest that CALD offenders are often being assessed as unsuitable for EQUIPS during development of case management plans. However, the same pattern was found for offenders serving custodial sentences, where referrals are largely determined through automated processing of standard eligibility criteria for risk, offence type and duration of sentence. It is possible that these results are an artefact of additional factors that could influence eligibility decisions, such as the offender's location or delays between the start of their corrections episode and the time that referrals are planned or processed.

This interpretation of the data is supported by findings that CALD status was not significantly associated with offenders' likelihood of commencing an EQUIPS program after they were referred, or completing a program after they had commenced. These outcomes are more sensitive to barriers associated with being deemed unsuitable for programs, and experiencing engagement or other responsivity challenges before and during the program, after accounting for basic eligibility factors.

Having a CALD background may not be consistently associated with responsivity factors that affect participation in programs because Corrective Services NSW definitional criteria are broad, and encompass a wide range of offenders with varying backgrounds and circumstances. Barriers associated with differing cultural norms or linguistic proficiencies may be minimal for many offenders who are from other western cultures, or are fluent in multiple languages. This is consistent with findings that CALD offenders showed comparable performance on measures of English literacy to non-CALD offenders on average.

A related consideration is that Indigenous Australian offenders are not strictly considered CALD offenders in line with definitions used by Corrective Services NSW and elsewhere. This complicates simple comparisons between CALD and non-CALD offenders, and raises implications about the utility of the CALD definition as an index of cultural diversity. In this regard we did find indications that Indigenous status was a significant predictor of EQUIPS participation and completion outcomes, which supports assertions that cultural diversity (when consistently identified and defined) is an important responsivity factor in engaging with offender services and programs.

We acknowledge that this study explores EQUIPS participation outcomes for CALD offenders on average, and the results may not reflect the experiences of many offenders within this group. It is likely that subsets of offenders would encounter significant barriers to program access and participation associated with their specific cultural background, or with linguistic diversity or limited proficiency in English language and literacy more broadly. There is a continuing need for offender programs to closely adhere to responsivity principles, as well as other support services such as availability of interpreters, in correctional settings to promote equitable and effective management of offenders of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

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