

Newsletter of the APS Aboriginal Issues, Aboriginal People and Psychology Interest Group

Australian Psychological Society

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Update from the Convenor

As the APS Conference approaches at the end of September, it is a good time to assess how the Interest group is going. And the results are very pleasing.

The group has worked effectively to raise the awareness issue of Aboriginal issues in the APS. So much has happened! The webpage for the Interest group is up and running. Visit www.psychology.org.au/aiapp Colleen Turner has done a wonderful job in building the website and assembling a fascinating range of resources. These include news, articles, books, pictures and links to valuable sites. I know that psychologists in my workplace have reacted very positively to the website and are using it. I encourage all our members to visit the site, send useful resources to Colleen for inclusion and encourage colleagues to use the site.

I would like to thank all the Committee for the hard work they have put into organising activities for the APS Conference in September. Aboriginal issues will be well represented. Marie Joyce has organised a traditional welcome for the Opening, Ailsa has booked Narana in Geelong for a professional visit, which will be an experience in reconciliation and an opportunity for us to invite interested people from schools and other professional colleagues to participate.

Two symposiums are planned within the Conference itself. One is about education and the second will focus on the well-being and importance of family for indigenous Australia.

We are approaching the APS to institute a prize for research into indigenous issues and to include the term "Torres Strait Island-

ers" into the title of our Interest Group.

I attended the DSI Reference Group face-to-face meeting in Melbourne in March where all the Interest Groups presented on their activities. Our group was one of the most active and we received strong support for our work from the APS. Discussions included the APS Strategic Plan '05-08', the proposal to establish a PD winter school in 2006. This would offer us a platform to invite indigenous trainers to work with psychologists to improve practice.

Keep up the good work! It is such a joy working with this Committee, particularly Kylie who, as secretary, has done so much to contribute to the success of this Group.

Kath Ellerman
Convenor

Update from the Editor

Welcome to the second edition of the Newsletter of the Aboriginal Issues, Aboriginal People and Psychology Interest Group. In this edition, the focus is on resources and protocols regarding health, treatment and intervention with indigenous clients. The aim was to explore some of the

more common as well as some of the new resources available in working with clients across a range of settings. I trust you will enjoy this edition. The passing of Harmony Week also provided an opportunity for reflection on cross cultural relations in our country. We look forward

to bringing you our third newsletter focusing on Family Programs, Indigenous Resources and Child Protection, coinciding with Child Protection Week. Your contributions are more than welcome. Regards, Kylie Cann

Volume 2, Issue 1

Inside this issue:

| | |
|--|---|
| Update from the Convenor | 1 |
| Update from the Editor | 1 |
| APS Ethical Guidelines | 2 |
| Current National Research | 2 |
| Websites, More National Research | 3 |
| Health, Website Feature | 4 |
| Upcoming Training Opportunities | 4 |
| Current Issues | 5 |
| Professional Development | 6 |
| About Us & Call for Indigenous Members | 7 |

Invitation for Articles and Ideas:
If you have ideas or suggestions for the committee, please contact us.

Research—National Perspectives

Westerman Aboriginal Symptom Checklist – Youth (WASC-Y). The following is PhD abstract has been provided for this newsletter with permission for use from Dr Tracey Westerman, a leading psychologist in the area of assessment and treatment of indigenous youth.

ABSTRACT

Bias in the assessment of Aboriginal youth experiencing mental health problems has long been recognised in the literature (Davidson, 1995; J.J Goodnow, 1988; Kearins, 1981). The basis of this bias lies in the lack of culturally valid tests and clinical assessment processes for use with this population (Davidson, 1995; T.G. Westerman & Kowal, 2002b). This study has developed and validated two separate protocols for Aboriginal youth aged 13-17 years in Urban (Perth) and Rural (North West) locations in Western Australia including; (a) a unique self-report inventory, the Westerman Aboriginal Symptom Checklist – Youth (WASC-Y), and (b) a set of clinician guidelines for use with the WASC-Y. These guidelines address identified sources of practitioner and interpretation bias in the assessment of Aboriginal youth. They include four main components, which were developed through focus groups with Aboriginal parents, youth and mental health professionals. First, a culturally valid engagement process for Aboriginal youth was developed. Second, interpretation guidelines, to assess for potential cultural variants in symptoms reported by Aboriginal youth. Third, a model of cultural validation, which assesses for the role of culture in mental health presentation. Finally, a model to guide the resolution of culturally related mental health problems. Factor and reliability analysis on the WASC-Y resulted in a 53-item inventory including six subscales of depression, suicide, alcohol / drug usage, impulsivity, anxiety and cultural resilience. Factor Analysis (FA) demonstrated good factor structure, with single factors accounting for variances of 34% to 82%. Internal reliability was also sound with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .75 to .88. Validation of the Clinician Guidelines was also determined by interviewing youth identified as being at risk (N=111) with this protocol and assessing engagement. 97% of all youth interviewed demonstrated good engagement. The extent of agreement between the WASC-Y and cultural / clinical validation interviews was also determined to be excellent through calculation of the Kappa statistic (kappa = 0.84).

Results of large-scale screening of Aboriginal youth (N=183) indicated that whilst overall risk for disorder was moderate, a significant percentage of the sample reported risk at high to very high levels across all subscales. Levels of cultural resilience were also characteristically low indicating a lack of protective factors against the development of disorder. Of particular note is that one-third of the sample reported high levels of risk across more than three subscales. This provides some initial evidence for the strong role of comorbidity of disorders for Aboriginal youth. ANOVA also failed to reveal any significant differences between genders or across geographical locations on any of the subscales. Correlations between subscales indicated significant relationships between impulsivity and suicide risk, depression and anxiety and depression and impulsivity. Correlational differences were found across geographical locations, including stronger relationships between suicide and impulsivity, **suicide and anxiety, depression and suicide and depression and anxiety for Urban compared to Rural youth. Cultural resiliency also had moderately stronger negative relationships with suicide, depression and anxiety in Urban areas than Rural areas. This study provides evidence of a need for the continued development and refinement of culture-specific assessment processes to enhance diagnosis, prognosis and intervention with Aboriginal youth at risk of mental health problems.**

For further information regarding training in the use of this instrument, please contact Indigenous Psychological Services on Phone: (08) 9362 2036 Fax: (08) 9362 5546 or visit www.indigenoupsychservices.com.au.

Websites of Interest

Stolen Generation

Bring them Home

www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/hreoc/stolen

Sorry Day (26th May)

<http://www.alphalink.com.au/~rez/Journey/>

Mabo Day (3rd June)

<http://www.atsic.gov.au/events/Mabo/default.asp>

Harmony Day (21st March)

View the 2005 Vice-Chancellor's oration delivered by former Governor General Sir William Deane at the University of Western Australia. Institute of Advanced Studies. Visit <http://www.ias.uwa.edu.au/>

Education

Torres Strait Books

www.torresstraitbooks.com.au

Indij Readers for Little Fullas, for Big Fullas

www.indijreaders.com.au

Sandtraks: Pathways to celebrating indigenous culture

www.sandtraks.com

Reconciliation

www.scholastic.com.au/schoolzone

Working with Indigenous People with a Disability:

<http://www.wired.org.au/>

Culture

Multicultural Affairs

www.premiers.qld.gov.au/about/maq/index.htm

First People's Project—Global Art Exchange

www.learn.ogr.au/fp

Mental Health

<http://auseinet.flinders.edu.au/> Auseinet informs, educates and promotes good practice in a range of sectors and the community about mental health promotion, prevention, early intervention and suicide prevention



Research—National Perspectives

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Western psychotherapeutic practice: Engaging Aboriginal people in culturally appropriate and respectful ways

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Abstract:

Until recently the majority of psychologists in Australia have been confronted by the lack of information relating to culturally appropriate methods of engagement and therapy with Aboriginal clients. Findings

from a qualitative study undertaken in Western Australia indicated that Aboriginal conceptualisations of mental health appear more holistic and contain elements that are both cultural and spiritual. The extent of these differences in conceptualisations from Western psychiatry and psychology are so vast that the mental health interventions need to be reconsidered. Extending from an Aboriginal mental health model are traditional treatments that endeavour to address the cultural and spiritual components of the mental illness. Findings from the study indicated that these treatments appeared to be hierarchically organised, depending on cause, severity, type of practitioner required and treatment. The findings also indicated that Aboriginal people generally

seek traditional interpretations and treatment of an illness and exhaust these avenues prior to contact with the Western mental health system. The research also delineated Aboriginal beliefs about Western psychotherapy, including conceptions about Western therapy. The authors propose an engagement model, including formative preparation, for non-Aboriginal practitioners intending to work with the Aboriginal community.

Abstracts for the latest 'Australian Psychologist', as well as previous editions, can be accessed online at <http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/journals>.

Health

The Need For Ethnic Donors

The Australian Red Cross Blood Service needs Indigenous Australian & Ethnic Donors to join the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry (ABMDR). For Donors to be compatible matches for patients, they must have identical white blood cells. Compatible white cells are only found in people of the same racial background. Along with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Indigenous Australians), there are many diverse ethnic commu-

nities living in Australia. We would welcome and strongly urge people from all of these communities to join the ABMDR. This would assist in finding donors for our Indigenous Australian & other Ethnic background patients. It is unlikely that these people requiring a bone marrow/stem cell transplant would find a donor in a registry that is made up of 97% people of North European descent.

For details of what's involved and how to enrol visit
<http://www.abmdr.org.au/enroll.htm>



Health—Website Feature

Do you need information about alcohol and other drugs, drug prevention, treatment services, research, community programs, health services, Government policies or new drug trends?

Use the Australian Drug Information Network database at www.adin.com.au This database is funded by the Federal Government and managed by the Australian Drug Foundation. ADIN search results are from 1500+ quality assured

sites to ensure the most comprehensive search of Australian and international alcohol and drug information.

Every website has been critically reviewed by alcohol and drug professionals for credible and useable content.

The website lists national and state listings for services relating to mainstream health, managed health, rural and remote

health, statistics, online libraries, mental health sites along with workforce development and teaching, research and further education. The website lists specific references, information and resources for working with Indigenous communities.

Upcoming Training Opportunities & Conferences

40th Annual Conference - Melbourne 2005

In 2005, Australia's largest psychology conference will take place in Melbourne from Wednesday 28 September to Sunday 2 October. The theme of the 40th APS Annual Conference is 'Past reflections, future directions' and seems highly appropriate when thinking about our fellow indigenous Australians

and the purpose of our interest group. As part of the Conference Program, the Interest Group is very proud to be co-ordinating a number of major events. Marie Joyce has organised a traditional welcome ceremony to be provided by the Wurundjeri people, Kathleen Ellerman-Bull is currently amidst negotiations to provide a guest speaker for the Symposium while Ailsa Drent and Colleen Turner having been

working tirelessly to co-ordinate an off-site visit to the Narana Community for what offers to be a truly unique experience. Please stay posted for further details about these events as the conference draws closer. In addition, all will be welcome to attend our AGM, with details to be published in the conference proceedings. We look forward to seeing you there.

Current Issues

Royal Commission into the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

The recent events for the Bwcolgman Community on Palm Island in North Queensland have led to media attention and revisiting of the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody National Report.

An overview and recommendations (1992) were written by Commissioner Elliott Johnston, QC - 1991 for the wider Indigenous community in response to a growing public concern that deaths in custody of Indigenous people were too common.

The **Executive Summary** reads as follows:

Between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989, ninety-nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people died in the custody of prison, police or juvenile detention institution.

The circumstances of their deaths were extremely varied. One cannot point to a common thread of abuse, neglect or racism that is common to these deaths. However, an examination of the lives of the ninety-nine shows that facts associated in every case with their Aboriginality played a significant and in most cases dominant role in their being in custody and dying in custody.

The reports on the individual deaths have been prepared by individual Commissioners who conducted the individual inquiries. This report summarises the findings of those individual reports and addresses the underlying issues, for example, social, cultural and legal factors which appear to have a bearing on the deaths.

The investigation into the deaths was extremely thorough. No effort was spared to get the truth. All contemporary documents were subpoenaed and studied. Relevant people were interviewed wherever possible and in great majority of instances this was possible. In many cases postmortem reports were considered by eminent pathologists. Not only the cause of death, but all aspects of custodial care

and the orders binding on custodians were critically examined. Hearings were held in public; families of the deceased were represented by legal counsel. All documents were made available to counsel. Reports on the ninety-nine deaths have been delivered to government. At the time of writing almost all have been tabled in parliament and thus made public.

The Commission's Final Report was widely accepted as an important and historic document, its eleven volumes and over 5000 pages representing the most comprehensive official account of the disparity of Indigenous peoples' situations in comparison to the broader Australian society ever compiled. The Commission detailed an extensive set of 339 recommendations to government, ranging broadly across the jurisdictional systems as well as related societal and historical factors. Sets of recommendations address areas including:

- ? matters arising from the deaths such as family counselling;
- ? post-death investigations;
- ? statistical and research information on Indigenous deaths in custody;
- ? diversion from policy custody;
- ? imprisonment as a last resort;
- ? custodial health and safety;
- ? prison custody;
- ? relations with police and the criminal justice system; and
- ? young Indigenous persons and the juvenile justice system.

The Commission's most compelling finding was that the real lives and deaths it examined were symptomatic of the conditions faced generally by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia today.

The Royal Commission found that the causes of deaths in custody were attributable to the disparate conditions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live with, and discrimination. It dealt in detail in its recommendations with the underlying causes, a central theme being to address the enormous disparity Indigenous peoples contend with in their daily lives. Realising our Government's stated policy of significant improvement in basic services areas - education, employment, housing and health - is critical. Such achievement relies on the continuing and coordinated effort of Commonwealth agencies with lead responsibility for these areas, as well as State and Territory and local governments. The partnership role of Indigenous networks in these endeavours is also crucial.

To obtain a copy of this full report please see your local or State library.

If you require additional information regarding Deaths in Custody please contact the Monitoring and reporting section of ATSIC on 02 6121 4735 or visit www.atsic.gov.au



Professional Development

We'd like to collect your views on P.D.

While it might still be something of a long term goal, I'd like to begin to generate some discussion about what future role this interest group might take in assisting to further develop the capacity of its members to work with indigenous communities.

Recently I learned that the psychoanalytically oriented psychologists (POPIG) interest group in Queensland held a presentation entitled "The Local Spirit". From what I understand the presenters of "The Local Spirit" worked on the irony that while Freud and Jung were influenced by anthropological studies of Australian aborigines, Australian indigenous culture seems not to influence present day Australian psychoanalytic practice.

I don't know that other therapeutic modalities have managed to engage more of the local spirit, though narrative therapists can claim to be more home grown.

In my experience, the POPIG in Melbourne have reliably delivered high quality professional development that is very affordable. I am sure this is true of a number of APS interest groups in a range of different states. Is professional development something the interest group should be working towards?

I recently attended an outstanding two day workshop with Ellert Nijenhuis and was pleased to meet other psychologists with an interest in trauma & dissociation and in working with our indigenous community. We found ourselves talking about the need for a peer support network.

One way of obtaining P.D. within the APS is the use of supervision or peer support groups. In addition to learning opportunities, peer support/supervision groups would help with inter-agency communication. Is this something our members might be interested in? Might the interest group also help with cross-cultural training workshops delivered by experienced indigenous community educators? And, what else ?

We'd like you to join with us and have a bit of a yarn with us about your P.D. ideas. Email Henry Briffa hbriffa@ozemail.com.au so that the committee might begin to plan for the future.

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APS ABORIGINAL ISSUES AND
PSYCHOLOGY INTEREST GROUP

We are now on the web!!
www.psychology.org.au/aiapp

ABOUT THE APS ABORIGINAL ISSUES AND PSYCHOLOGY

INTEREST GROUP

The APS has been involved in indigenous issues since the 1960s, when a Queensland Group became active with submissions to government on secondary education, child welfare and Aboriginal welfare. The original Group for Aboriginal Issues, Aboriginal People and Psychology was established primarily as a way of assisting the small number of indigenous members to the Society to network and to promote discussion of social issues with non-indigenous members. The APS interest group re-formed in 1992. The full history of this group is set out in Sandra Billard, Heather Gridley and Colleen Turner, 'Report from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and Psychology Interest Group of the Australian Psychological Society', Bulletin, Vol. 16, No. 4, August/September 1994, pp. 23-24. The Committee recognises the vast representation of indigenous tribes and clans across Australia and seeks ongoing input and guidance from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The interest group is concerned with promoting best psychological practice for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The interest group currently has 155 members.

Source: Cook, S (2000) A Meeting of the Minds: The Australian Psychological Society and Australian Psychologists. APS, Melbourne. (Provided by Alex Bignell and Henry Briffa)

Call for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Members of the APS

As an APS Interest Group focussing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, we are naturally concerned that the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members are heard and attended to.

We believe that we have 16 or 17 indigenous members in the Interest Group and the APS. But we don't know for sure! So, the Interim Executive is very keen to hear from any members who would like to contribute to and guide our deliberations. One way to do that is to join the Committee.

There are other ways of making a contribution, through providing advice and insights or through identifying resources that the Committee may follow-up.

In consultation with the APS Conference Organising Committee, one of our major objectives has been to co-ordinate some key-note speakers and workshops for the Conference this coming September in Melbourne who will be able to raise issues and awareness and give guidance to Psychologists who may work with indigenous children, adults or communities.

So, we need all the help we can get. Interested? Give Kath Ellerman-Bull a call at Kids Help Line ((07) 3369 1588 or email her at

Kathleen@kidshelp.com.au.



Walking Together
Working Together

Quote

That people should suffer from want in a world of excess, that is the greatest shame of all. (Sir Bob Geldoff, 2002, 60 minutes interview) Quoted in Westerman, T. (2004) Engagement of Indigenous clients in mental health services: What role do cultural differences play? Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health, 3 (3) 1-7.