Perinatal* support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who have experienced complex childhood trauma

Dr Catherine Chamberlain, Dr Graham Gee and Professor Stephanie Brown for the Healing the past by nurturing the future project team

*Pregnancy to 2 years after birth

Acknowledgements

Healing the past by nurturing the future project team

Participating institutions
Presentation outline

1. Context of complex trauma among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia

2. Healing the past by nurturing the future: project aims and plans

3. Progress so far

1.1 Context of complex childhood trauma among Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in Australia

Colonization

Overt violence
Covert structural violence
Psychosocial domination


International Childhood Trauma Conference 1/8/2018
1.2 Socioecological influences for violence and trauma

![WHO ecological framework illustrating examples of risk factors for violence at every level](image)

A WHO ecological framework illustrating examples of risk factors for violence at every level


1.3 Trauma prevalence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- 'Complex trauma' occurs as a result of cumulative exposure to multiple traumatic experiences, often involves interpersonal violation within the child's care giving system.  
- Current prevalence unclear as no clear criteria
- Aboriginal children seven times more likely to be assessed as exposed to 'substantiated' child abuse
- Aboriginal people experience as high as 10 - 12 different traumatic events in a life time
- Elevated rates of PTSD in Aboriginal communities: 58%, 40%


Children receiving child protection services by Indigenous status, states and territories
1.4 Complex trauma in the perinatal period

Figure 9.3: "Within your service, how significant do you consider the issues surrounding trauma, stress and grief are when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the perinatal period?"

1.5 Complex trauma impacts social and emotional wellbeing

- Health, neural integration, body integrity
- Thoughts, memories, beliefs, sense of self
- Easily shutdown, startled
- Dysregulation
- Intimate relationships, including parenting
- Role, purpose, community

Model adapted from blue knot training
1.6 Incorporating an Aboriginal worldview

*Songs of Strength, Ink on paper, 2018 © Shawana Andrews*

A father, mother and child wearing possum skin cloaks and looking to the ancestors and past generations. The parents are connected with a songline which gives them strength. The stones below represent a strong foundation and the stitching on the cloaks represent the relational connectedness of Aboriginal people and worldview.

1.7 Perinatal period: a unique life-course opportunity for healing and preventing intergenerational transmission of trauma

- Parenting transition offers a unique life-course opportunity for healing, even after severe trauma.
- Most parents are able to provide nurturing care.
- Potential to disrupt the cycle of trauma through loving relationships that promote healing (‘earned security’).
- Frequent scheduled contacts with service providers

Broad themes included in WHO European review of social determinants of health to improve health equities (Marmot et al. 2012).

2.1 Project aims and plans

The aims of this Lowitja Institute and NHMRC funded study are to co-design:

1. Acceptable, valid, safe and feasible strategies to **recognise and assess** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents during the perinatal period (pregnancy to 24 months postpartum) who have experienced complex trauma.

2. Acceptable, safe and feasible **awareness and support strategies** that could be offered during the perinatal period to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who have experienced complex trauma.

2.2 Approach and frameworks

**Formative process orientated research informed by:**

1. Community-based participatory action research approach (CBPAR) with 4 ‘plan, act, observe, reflect’ cycles

2. Intervention Mapping framework (first four steps)

3. Power Threat Meaning Framework

4. Population-based Screening framework
2.3 CBPAR Approach and Intervention Mapping framework

2.4 Values and Principles

1. Safety*
2. Trustworthiness*
3. Empowerment*
4. Collaboration*
5. Culture
6. Holistic
7. Compassion
8. Reciprocity

*National Trauma Guideline Principles
2.5 Project structure

- Four monthly newsletters and website information
- Invited to attend four co-design workshops across project
- Invited to every fourth monthly meeting (last Tues 12.30-2.30pm)
- Invited to monthly meeting (last Tues 12.30-2.30pm)

- Community and broader stakeholder group (national and international)
- Key stakeholders
- Investigator governance group
- Investigator and project staff operational group

3.1 Progress so far

We are here
3.2 Workshop 1 summary: Evidence and goals

1. Scoping review of evidence of 55 studies involving parents
2. Discussion on goals

**Most important aspects of the project:**
- Being involved with an Aboriginal-led CBPAR project
- ‘Making a difference’, hope and opportunities for healing
- Creating clear evidence-based tools and resources
- Embedding culture in strategies and incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge
- Better outcomes for kids

**Concerns about:**
- Risks of screening, negative diagnostic and triggering punitive child protection responses.
- Need to ‘care for the carers’, provide ‘holistic’ care and consider different needs of different age groups.

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3.3 Workshop 1: Cultural and emotional safety

- Appropriate and open communication
- Reciprocity, collaboration and unity
- Flexibility and open to change
- Participating, learning and recognising community expertise and needs
- Attendees want to be heard and be valued
- Guidelines, leadership and commitment to achieve goals and outcomes

3.3 Workshop 1: Context

Summary

1. Complex intergenerational trauma particularly affects Aboriginal communities but perinatal period offers unique life-course opportunity for healing.

2. This Aboriginal-led formative process-orientated CBPAR project aims to develop perinatal strategies to increase awareness (trauma-informed care), recognise, assess and support Aboriginal parents who have experienced complex childhood trauma.

3. Early days for this project
Questions? Comments? Advice?

Cultures Child, Ink on paper, 2018 © Shawana Andrews
A father, mother and child wearing possum skin cloaks sitting by a myrnong daisy, the father holds the stem and looks to the daisy as it holds history and knowledge of the ancestors, this gives him strength. The mother holds a newborn and rests against the stem, it supports her. Mother and father are on different sides of the stem representing their different paths and roles in caring and nurturing for children. The daisy is in flower but also has a new bud and speaks of future generations and continuity. The stones below represent a strong foundation of many generations and the stitching on the cloaks represent the relational connectedness of Aboriginal people and worldview. The mother’s hair blows in the wind, representing change.

Thankyou

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