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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing: implications for a CBT framework

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Abstract: Research Aims/Questions

It has been acknowledged that the mental health of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been 'bedeviled' by the inappropriate application of non-Indigenous models of mental health. Given the poor health outcomes of Indigenous people, another approach to mental health practice is required. In order to enhance Indigenous health and wellbeing it is necessary for non-Indigenous practitioners to find a culturally safe way in which to enter the negotiated space of cross-cultural mental health. This will be facilitated through understanding both the points of similarity and divergence in perspectives of mental health across cultures. The current study aimed to explore urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's understandings of mental health using a positive psychology framework.

Methodology

A qualitative research project was conducted with a sample of 19 Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people. Data was collected via individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify themes within the data.

Conclusion

Four themes emerged as reflecting health and wellbeing – coping skills, knowledge, social support, and connectedness. The theme of connectedness to country, family and kinship, cultural knowledge and social networks emerged as reflecting a unique contribution to Indigenous health and wellbeing. However, the themes of coping skills, knowledge and social support shared cross-cultural meaning. In particular, coping skills identified in the behavioural, emotional and cognitive domains shared many cross-culturally applicable avenues for intervention. Therapeutic interventions in these domains are already well established within cognitive behaviour therapies. It is the cross-cultural understandings within these themes that offer clinicians a culturally safe avenue for supporting Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.

Keywords: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Cross-cultural understanding Cultural competence Culturally safe practice Mental health Wellbeing

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