Aboriginality & disability in WA today

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Masters Candidate

“Talking about health, wellbeing and disability in children and young people: an Aboriginal perspective”

http://bmw.curtin.edu.au
Acknowledgements

**Supervisors:** Jan Piek, Cori Williams, Jillian Pearsall-Jones & Marion Kickett

**Cultural Consultant:** George Hayden

I acknowledge that I live and work in Whadjuk Country on the land of the Noongar people. I am privileged to be working with Aboriginal people from all walks of life.
OVERVIEW

In the beginning

Where are we now

Moving forward
## In the beginning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Indigenous Cultures</strong></th>
<th><strong>Western Cultures</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. Aboriginal &amp; Torres Strait Islanders</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Cultural Difference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Collectivist</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Being’</td>
<td>‘Doing’</td>
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<tr>
<td>No translatable term for disability</td>
<td>Impairment, handicap, disability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holistic (past &amp; present)</td>
<td>Medical model (ICF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cared for within community</td>
<td>Rehabilitation support &amp; services (e.g. institutions, government)</td>
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In the beginning

Causes of disability in Indigenous cultures worldwide:

- Disharmony of body, mind, spirit
- Violation of lore or parental transgressions
- Physical defect = animal
- Evil spirits
In the beginning

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander worldviews

- **No word** for disability
- Don’t see themselves as having a disability; or many **not aware** of disability
- Traditionally **not stigmatised**
- **No difference** between disability and health issues
- Congenital disability vs. accidents
- May be seen as 'special' or a 'pay-back' for a past wrongdoing
- **Visible conditions** more likely to be identified as a disability
- Only an issue if condition became a handicap

(Ariotti, 1999; Branson, 1992; McDonald, 2009; Mokak, 1997; O’Neill et al. 2004; Senior, 2000)
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander worldviews

- **Shame**
- Lack of independence may not be seen as a major issue in some Aboriginal communities if person fulfils family and relationship obligations
- Some value **mobility** rather than upper limb function
- Responsibility of:
  - welfare
  - a family or community problem (may not actively seek help)
  - self, demand no special attention or burden to community

(McDonald, 2006; Maher, 1999; O’Neill *et al.* 2004)
In the beginning


- Disability framed by the International Classification of Impairments, Disability and Handicaps (disease within the social context)
  - Impairment = loss or abnormality of anatomical structure or function
  - Disability = body as well as tasks, skills and behaviour
  - Handicap = social consequences
Disability defined by World Health Organisation (2000’s)

- Renamed International Classification of Functioning, Disability & Health (ICF)
- Emphasis on rehabilitation
- Include Environmental Factors, Activity and Participation
- Still framed within individualistic & ‘doing’ orientation
Where are we now?

- Goals: focus on culture, education, health and human rights
- Health of Indigenous people a global concern
- Disproportion within Australia declared a national emergency

United Nations Human Development Index (2013)
- Measures quality of life across 187 nations
- Australia ranked 2nd to Norway
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders ranked 122nd
Where are we now?

**Australia (ABS, SCRGSP)**
- Rate Indigenous x 2 > Non-Indigenous
- 1 in 2 Indigenous adults had some form of disability
- ~8% aged 15 yrs + “profound or severe core activity limitation”
- Remote areas (8.1%) > non-remote areas (7.9%)

**WA (NDS, DSC)**
- 1 in 5 Western Australians live with a disability
- ~252,100 carers (approximately 10% total population)
- Aboriginal people have severe/profound disability rates x 2
- Aboriginal children and young people represented 6.3% of clients (males x 2 > females)
Where are we now?

Prevalence in children and young people

AUSTRALIA (NATSISS)
- Almost 10% of Indigenous children had an eye or sight problem

WA (WAACHS)
- Almost 20% of Indigenous children had recurring ear infections
- 27% of 4-17 year olds are limited in one or more sensory functions or pain
  - Impact on education > health literacy, employment etc.
Where are we now?

**Factors contributing to disability**

- Access to health
- Housing (e.g. sanitation)
- Violence, abuse
- Substance dependency
- Psycho-social impact (colonisation, dispossession)
- Trans-generational trauma
- Poverty
- Education & health literacy

*(as identified by First Peoples Disability Network)*
Where are we now?

Access
• Rates in Aboriginal population high, but service access relatively low

• Barriers: social, cultural and structural
  • Social: e.g. family situations
  • Cultural: e.g. perceptions of disability
  • Structural: e.g. inflexible health systems
Where are we now?

**Barriers to access**

- Shame & stigma
- Geographic isolation
- Awareness
- Gender roles
- High financial cost
- Educational attainment (> health literacy & low income)
- Family allegiances
- Trauma & abuse
- Lack of information
- Language
- Grief & stress
Moving forward

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal ways of working</th>
<th>Facilitators</th>
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<tr>
<td>Collectivist, ‘Being’</td>
<td>Family Centred Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>No translatable term for disability</td>
<td>Re-education of disability health professionals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health &amp; disability – holistic</td>
<td>Cultural awareness &amp; security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cared for within community</td>
<td>Wellness centres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disharmony of body, mind, spirit; evil spirits</td>
<td>Respite care by family members</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Build capacity of families &amp; carers e.g. awareness</td>
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<td>Traditional medicine</td>
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<td>Fostering strong spirit &amp; culture</td>
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Moving forward

NDIS Conference
June 2013

L-R: Caris & Jillian
The Centre for Cerebral Palsy
Moving forward

First Peoples Disability Network (Australia) visit WA – Nov 2013
L-R: Damian, Aquinas & Alex

WA Aboriginal Disability Network – (incorporated Dec 2013)
Supported by Aboriginal Legal Service
“Talking about health, wellbeing and disability in children and young people: an Aboriginal perspective”

• Investigate the meaning of health, wellbeing and disability to Aboriginal youths

• Explore enablers and barriers to health and wellbeing

• Report of key differences and similarities between children with and without disabilities
SUGGESTION, COMMENTS & QUERIES?

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“Write or draw the happy and sad (or hard) things in your life”
References

• Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (TICHR) (2007). *Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey – Disabilities*