

# ANROWS Footprints

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AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY  
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*



### **Acknowledgement of Country**

ANROWS acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past, present and future; and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and knowledge.

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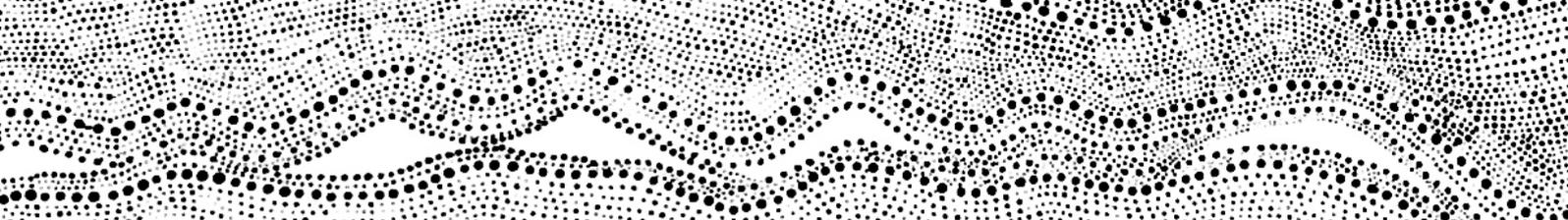
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# ANROWSPublications

ANROWS produces and publishes new, innovative and relevant research on domestic, family and sexual violence through its suite of publications.

## Subscribe

Subscribe and receive updates to your inbox, including:

- ANROWS Notepad: Our fortnightly update on the latest research on domestic, family and sexual violence, upcoming events and training, and more
- ANROWS Footprints: Our thematic quarterly publication, communicating new, innovative and emerging research, policy and practice aimed at reducing violence against women and their children.

[www.anrows.org.au/subscribe](http://www.anrows.org.au/subscribe)

## Join our networking database

The ANROWS Networking database is a national online community bringing together, practitioners, policy makers and members of the community with an interest in reducing domestic, family and sexual violence.

Join online to share your knowledge and expertise with a national audience; find people with particular expertise, organisations working on similar or complementary projects and/or potential partners for research project grants.

[www.anrows.org.au/networking-database/register](http://www.anrows.org.au/networking-database/register)

## Available now

### ANROWS Notepad

Fortnightly email update on the latest research, events, training, stakeholder news and issues in the media.

### ANROWS Fast Facts

Key facts and figures on topics related to violence against women and their children.

### ANROWS Footprints

Thematic quarterly publication focussed on communicating new, innovative and emerging research, policy and practice addressing violence against women and their children.

We warmly welcome proposals for contributions to ANROWS Footprints. Please send expressions of interest on potential content to the editors by email to [enquiries@anrows.org.au](mailto:enquiries@anrows.org.au).

## Coming in 2015

### ANROWS Horizons: Research papers

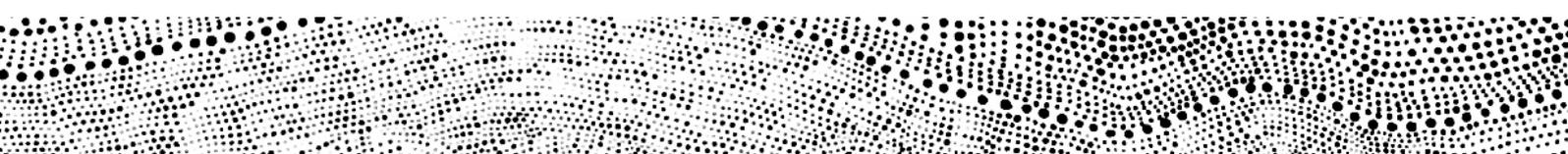
In-depth reports on empirical research produced under ANROWS's Research Program.

### ANROWS Compass: Research to practice and policy papers

Concise papers that summarise key findings of research on violence against women and their children, including research produced under ANROWS's Research Program, and provide advice on the implications for policy and practice.

### ANROWS Landscapes: State of knowledge papers

Medium length papers that scope current knowledge on an issue related to violence against women and their children. Papers will draw on empirical research, including research produced under ANROWS's research program, and/or practice knowledge.



# Welcome

Welcome to ANROWS Footprints, a thematic quarterly publication focussed on communicating new, innovative and emerging research, and policy and practice initiatives addressing violence against women and their children.

Each edition of ANROWS Footprints will correspond to a key research theme, and reflect the breadth and depth of the ANROWS Research Program 2014-16, for the duration of that program. Launched in October 2014, the research program comprises 20 projects with a total value of \$3.5 million.

The research program includes projects addressing sexual, domestic and family violence, which have been identified as priority areas of research for ANROWS under the National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

The theme of this edition of ANROWS Footprints is Indigenous family and sexual violence. In this edition you will find:

- information on ANROWS research projects with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- researchers reflecting on their ANROWS research projects and the importance of collaboration between academics and services providers, in *Sidebyside*
- a feature article from ANROWS Board Director Victoria Hovane on the importance of Aboriginal Law and Culture in understanding and responding to domestic and family violence from an Aboriginal perspective; and
- an interview with Indigenous academic and activist Michelle Deshong on her experiences as a public servant, advocate and now researcher.

ANROWS Footprints is one of a suite of ANROWS publications. Currently available is this edition of Footprints, the fortnightly ANROWS Notepad and ANROWS Fast Facts. Yet to come are a set of publications that will convey the results of the ANROWS Research Program empirical research and knowledge translation and exchange activities. They include ANROWS Horizons (Research papers), ANROWS Landscapes (State of knowledge papers) and ANROWS Compass (Research to Practice and Policy papers). These will be available on the ANROWS website following a rigorous peer review process.



ANROWS's electronic resources are available to you at no cost. If you haven't already, I encourage you to subscribe to ANROWS publications at <http://www.anrows.org.au/subscribe>. Subscribers will receive directly, free of charge, ANROWS Notepad, every fortnight; ANROWS Footprints, each quarter; and alerts to newly published ANROWS research and upcoming ANROWS events. All published ANROWS resources can be accessed from our website ([anrows.org.au](http://anrows.org.au)).

Your feedback on ANROWS products is always welcome, and feedback is particularly encouraged for this first edition of ANROWS Footprints. This is a resource to share information about ANROWS research and activities with you and your colleagues, but it is also an opportunity to highlight work relevant to violence against women across Australia. Any ideas you have for the structure and content of future editions of ANROWS Footprints would be very warmly received. Our goal is to make this quarterly publication topical, timely and of value to you and I encourage you to contact ANROWS Footprints editors, Dr Trishima Mitra-Kahn and Jess Gregory, if you would like to offer your thoughts on the publication.

Best wishes,

Heather Nancarrow  
Chief Executive Officer

# theCalendar



## ANROWS hosts Professor Liz Kelly CBE

Prominent British researcher and activist Professor Liz Kelly CBE will deliver two ANROWS events and a special interview during her visit to Australia.

Professor Kelly, who has worked in the field of violence against women and children for almost 30 years, will share her policy, practice, and research expertise at a workshop in Sydney and a public lecture in Adelaide. Professor Kelly is Co-Chair of the End Violence Against Women Coalition UK (EVAW) and Professor of Sexualised Violence at London Metropolitan University.

### Workshop: Key issues in sexual assault practice: Reflections and discussions from research

Monday 9 February 2015, 1.00 - 4.30pm. Australian Technology Park, Eveleigh, Sydney, NSW.

Please note Expressions of Interest for this workshop have closed.

### Public Lecture: Re-visiting the continuum of sexual violence in the 21st century

Friday 13 February 2015, 12.30 - 2.00pm. Meeting Hall, Adelaide Town Hall, Adelaide, SA.

Recording available on our website in early March.

More information on these events is available on our website [www.anrows.org.au](http://www.anrows.org.au)



## 2015 Indigenous leadership workshop presented by Indigenous Allied Health Australia

Tuesday 17 February to Thursday 19 February 2015. Alice Springs, NT.

Contact [admin@iaha.com.au](mailto:admin@iaha.com.au) for more information



## Asia-Pacific conference on gendered violence and violations

Tuesday 10 February - Thursday 12 February 2015.  
University of New South Wales, Kensington, NSW.

The Gendered Violence Research Network (GVRN) – a joint initiative of UNSW Arts and Social Sciences and UNSW Law – will hold its Inaugural Asia-Pacific Conference on Gendered Violence and Violations at The University of New South Wales in Sydney on 10-12 February 2015.

Full conference details are available at <https://gvrnconference.arts.unsw.edu.au/>



## The 2015 Australian Winter School conference

Wednesday 22 July to Friday 24 July 2015. Brisbane, Qld.

The Australian Winter School (AWS) is a national drug and alcohol conference presented by Lives Lived Well, one of Queensland's leading non-government alcohol and other drug providers.

This year two of the key topics are domestic and family violence and child safety. There is a growing impetus for a more comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the causes of domestic and family violence (DFV) and child safety, and its prevention and treatment across the broader welfare system. This includes an increased focus on the interrelationship between sectors such as alcohol and other drugs (AOD), child and family welfare, child protection and DFV.

We are looking for conference speakers and workshops to inspire delegates and introduce them to new ideas and ways of thinking and working.



### Supporting children & young people who have experienced domestic and family violence conference

Wednesday 25 March to Thursday 26 March 2015. Alfred Cove WA.

The Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA), (WCDFVS) is hosting a forum to discuss good practice in supporting children and young people who have experienced domestic and family violence.

The conference will focus on comparing models of good practice around the variety of ways in which we can work towards advancing child/young person's wellbeing. It will also serve to provide a forum for the exchange of skills, knowledge and experience between practitioners in the domestic and family violence sector and other relevant fields.



### Say no to domestic violence conference (national Indigenous domestic violence conference)

Monday 12 October to Wednesday 14 October 2015. Gold Coast, Qld.

Indigenous Conference Services (Australia) is pleased to host this year's National Indigenous Domestic Violence Conference, focusing on a Brighter Future.

The event is designed to be the largest national gathering of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people with an interest in stopping domestic violence in Indigenous communities. The aim of the conference is to highlight and showcase successful community and research programs, which have led to positive impacts and outcomes within these communities.



### 15th International symposium of the World Society of Victimology

Sunday, 5 July to Thursday 9 July 2015. Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre, Perth, WA.

Victims Support Australia in partnership with angelhands Inc. will hold the 15th International Symposium of the World Society of Victimology (WSV).

The Symposium invites International and Australian presenters from the broader discipline of Victimology and brings them together in one of Australia's most beautiful cities. Western Australia is a community that is at the forefront of victim support services.



Australasian Council of Women and Policing

### Australasian Council of Women and Policing conference. Making history: shaping the future

Monday 31 August to Thursday 3 September 2015. Luna Park, Sydney, NSW.

The Australasian Council of Women and Policing is calling for papers for the 9th Australasian Women and Policing Conference being held in Luna Park, Sydney from 31 August to 3 September 2015.

The Conference will build on previous Australian Women and Policing Conferences and continue to develop the body of knowledge around how policing is being improved for women, in particular:

- policing for women in the Pacific
- women's leadership within policing and the leadership role that women in policing play in their local communities in Australia and globally; and
- innovative responses to violence against women.



*“The research program has an ambitious reach with research sites in every state and territory.”*

Heather Nancarrow, CEO

L to R: Dr Cathy Vaughan, Dr Adele Murdolo, The Hon. Quentin Bryce AD CVO.

# ANROWS Research Program 2014-16 (Part 1)

On Friday 31 October 2014, the Hon. Quentin Bryce launched ANROWS’s first research program in Sydney.

**The ANROWS Research Program 2014-16 (Part 1) will produce research on domestic, family and sexual violence under the National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (National Research Agenda) to support the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.**

Women with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women, women in rural areas and Australian Indigenous communities will be the focus of particular projects within the program.

The research program comprises 20 projects with a total value of \$3.5 million. Projects vary in length and will be delivered at different points over the next two years.

Each project will address a key gap in current evidence on violence against women and their children. These gaps are identified in the National Research Agenda according to four strategic research themes: experience and impacts of violence against women, gender inequality and prevention, effectiveness of service responses and interventions, and the impact of systems. ANROWS has identified knowledge translation and

exchange as a fifth strategic research theme, which is also addressed in the research program.

The research program has an ambitious reach with research sites in every state and territory. Projects focus on different types of violence against women and priority population groups identified in the National Research Agenda.

ANROWS CEO, Heather Nancarrow, said service providers, policy makers and researchers across Australia had an important role in the development of the research program.

“We are grateful for the expert advice we have received from across Australia. It has been crucial to the entire process, from developing the National Research Agenda and our current research priorities, to assessing grant applications and advising on large scale projects.”

“Many of the research projects see researchers and community organisations working together to produce innovative and relevant research. It’s exciting to see goodwill from so many organisations but it will be even better to see the results of their research,” Ms Nancarrow said.

Full details on the ANROWS Research Program 2014-16 (Part 1), including information on individual projects, are available on our website.



# ANROWS Projects

Each edition, we examine several projects from the ANROWS Research Program 2014-16 for the duration of that program, to communicate the research endeavour and its intended outcome.

Source: <http://www.pexels.com/photo/27571>

## State of knowledge report on existing knowledge, practice and responses to violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities.

**Research has linked the over-representation of Indigenous women in statistics on violence against women to the various inter-generational impacts of colonisation and socio-economic exclusion.**

For Indigenous women, gender and racial inequality intersect to underpin their experience of substantially higher rates of violence compared to non-Indigenous women. Research consistently reveals that the support needs of Indigenous women subjected to domestic, family and sexual violence are not well met through mainstream approaches and service models.

Indigenous women have called for services that address the needs of the whole family, that are community owned and driven, and that account for cultural and place-based contexts in which the violence occurs and services are delivered. Indigenous communities have also embarked on a variety of innovative community driven responses to violence against women.

This conceptual report will provide a comprehensive overview of the existing state of knowledge on Australian Indigenous experiences, understandings and responses to violence against women.

A number of ANROWS priority topics either directly or indirectly address Indigenous experiences of violence against women. This report will inform longer term projects involving empirical research.

A key component of this project is the exploration of how Australian Indigenous women and communities see and

experience the issue of violence against women (including what sits behind the definition of Indigenous family violence, the nature and role of interconnectedness, and broader holistic perspectives).

Particular attention will be paid to capturing what Indigenous women and communities have said about what works (including specific programs or approaches and/or key features of such approaches), what is needed across the continuum from prevention to intervention, and what constitutes success and innovation in the context of violence against women.

This project will provide information on the experiences of, and responses to, Indigenous women who have experienced violence.

### Principal chief investigator

Dr Ray Lovett, Research Fellow, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and Adjunct Research Fellow National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University.

### Chief investigator

Dr Anna Olsen, National Health and Medical Research Council Post-doctoral fellow, The Kirby Institute, The University of New South Wales and Visiting Research Fellow, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University.

### Approximate project length 6 months

### Maximum budget \$40,000

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## Evaluation of innovative models of interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated responses to family and/or sexual violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities.

**The high prevalence and incidence of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is well documented. Over the past decade, there has been an increasing number of Indigenous-specific responses to violence against women, including interagency collaborations, integrated responses and a range of innovative, holistic, and community driven (grass roots) responses. Robust, formal evaluations of such programs are needed across a spectrum of different types of approaches designed to reduce family violence, and evaluations need to be at various intervals in the lifespan of a program.**

This project will analyse whole-of-family and whole-of-community approaches within some Indigenous communities that address the needs of women, children, men and extended family members as a family unit. It will analyse how government interagency processes can engage with, and include, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in partnerships to resolve domestic and family violence and sexual assault including through community-led committees.

The project will include comparative evaluations of approaches in different Indigenous Australian communities that can identify key elements of successful approaches that may apply in more than one context (i.e. in a different Indigenous community to those included in the study). It will be conducted in collaboration with one or more Indigenous communities and/or Indigenous organisations.

Employing a 'realist' comparative research methodology, this project will evaluate the impact of innovative, coordinated family violence interventions in three sites in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland, with the aim of identifying how initiatives work, or fail to work. Realist approaches assume that nothing works everywhere for everyone; context makes a big difference to program outcomes. A realist evaluation asks not 'what works?' but 'how or why does this work, for whom, and in what circumstances?'

A prime focus of the project will be the degree of integration between community led and mainstream agencies, and whether new 'hybrid' practices that are being developed could act as models for other places and jurisdictions. Realist approaches are particularly useful in Indigenous communities where initiatives may be generated by a host of factors often 'invisible' to mainstream methodologies, such as the input of elders, women, culture and spirituality.

The research sets out from the proposition that successful initiatives are 'hybrid' processes that generate new engagement spaces 'in-between' Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains. The research will be largely qualitative (sharing stories with workers, police, night patrols, relevant health and justice personnel, family violence lawyers and others) supplemented by quantitative analysis of local systems (e.g. trends in prosecutions, court outcomes, hospitalisation, referrals to services).

This project will provide evidence on how services can work better together to respond to domestic and family violence in Australian Indigenous communities.

### Principal chief investigator

Professor Harry Blagg, Winthrop Professor of Criminology, Associate Dean (Research) Law Faculty, University of Western Australia.

### Chief investigator

Associate Professor Emma Thompson, The Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University.

### Research partners / team members

Ms June Oscar, CEO, Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre and Mr John McRoberts, Commissioner for Police, Northern Territory Police.

### Approximate project length 2 years

### Maximum budget \$200,000

## **Advocacy for safety and empowerment: Good practice and innovative approaches with Indigenous women experiencing domestic and family violence in remote and regional Australia.**

**Over past decades there has been much debate about ways of supporting victims of domestic and family violence, especially of Indigenous women in remote and regional areas. This research seeks to explore how remote and regional women's organisations that serve Indigenous populations have learned lessons and thrived. It will be conducted in partnership with three community-based, women's specialist services that are long established in their communities, and are influenced by the politics of self-determination, identity and empowerment.**

Previous research has noted the sparse, fragmented and fragile nature of knowledge on emerging good practice with and for Indigenous women experiencing domestic and family violence. Further, there is disquiet that Indigenous perspectives have not been sufficiently acknowledged to generate impact. At the same time, there has been no comprehensive analysis and assessment of areas where there has been long-term and extensive engagement between women's specialist services and Indigenous women.

There is a demonstrable need for a re-assessment of the current state of play, as well as a new evaluation of selected long-established community-based women's services and their support for Indigenous women experiencing domestic and family violence. In essence, what has been learned over the past 20 years that can guide the future?

The overall goal of this research is to improve the evidence-base on, and resources for, key areas of concern to specialist women's services, namely advocacy, safety planning and outreach, so that it may incorporate Indigenous women's perspectives. The objectives of the project address four inter-related evaluation questions:

- What are effective approaches to working with Indigenous women who have experienced domestic and family violence in remote and regional Australia?
- What are Indigenous women's perspectives on and priorities for women's specialist services in remote and regional Australia?
- How can Indigenous women's views be more effectively integrated into service practice and delivery in remote and regional Australia?
- What are useful methods and resources for regional and remote services that work with Indigenous women experiencing domestic and family violence?

The research project will work in partnership with three well-known, innovative women's services with deep community connections: the Alice Springs Women's Shelter (ASWS), Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPYWC) Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) Service, and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) in the Australian Capital Territory. By adopting a comparative case study methodology and realist evaluation approach with the three partner organisations, the project will highlight key features that contribute to or undermine effective and collaborative support for and with Indigenous women.

In co-developing and testing methods for monitoring and evaluation, the project will produce practical resources for regional and remote domestic and family violence services, and ultimately improve responses and support for Indigenous women and their children. In the longer term, the project will reinforce the social, cultural and political standing of Indigenous women in their endeavours to address domestic and family violence, and contribute to improved safety for Indigenous women and their children.

### **Principal chief investigator**

Dr Judy Putt, Adjunct Senior Lecturer, University of New England.

### **Chief investigator**

Dr Robyn Holder, Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice & Governance, Griffith University.

### **Research partners / team members**

Ms Dale Wakefield, Coordinator, Alice Springs Women's Shelter (ASWS); Ms Andrea Mason, Coordinator, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Family and Domestic Violence Service (NPYWC FDVS); and Mirjana Wilson, Executive Director, ACT Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS)

### **Approximate project length 18 months**

### **Budget \$245,294**

## Seeking help for domestic violence: Exploring rural women's coping experiences.

**Little is known about how social and geographical isolation shape women's coping abilities and domestic violence service provision. This project will gain insights into women's help seeking behaviour and coping mechanisms, as well as how workforce, resources and contextual factors impact on service provision in particular rural and remote regions.**

To date, only a small number of studies have turned their attention to exploring how rural women make decisions within contexts of domestic violence. This research has found that rural women use more placating and safety planning strategies rather than separating from or leaving their abusive partners.

Studies have also established that rural women in domestic violence relationships prefer to reach out to informal support networks for assistance but often receive responses that negate, discount or minimise their experiences and hence they are treated in a non-supportive manner. When informal support is unavailable or not helpful rural women hesitate to contact formal services, particularly legal and police support for fear of anonymity and confidentiality being compromised.

Research has recognised that rural police work is performed under different constraints to metropolitan police work. Police officers in rural areas are often themselves isolated and under-resourced. Police officers and service providers are more likely to know many people in the community personally and may find it difficult to maintain a balance between their work and their personal lives. Rural women's use of information and support networks, and their effectiveness, is pivotal in attempts to cope with and/or leave domestic violence. This is particularly so for Indigenous women.

Research has also found that rural women cope with domestic violence for long periods of time. This exposure to abuse can cause significant physical, mental, psychosocial and financial impairments. However, we know little about how social and geographical isolation actually shapes coping strategies for Australian women experiencing domestic violence. Understanding women's coping is central to understanding how they disclose and report, and why they seek help at particular times in their lives.

What is needed in the Australian context is a more nuanced understanding of how social and geographical isolation impacts on 'help seeking' and shapes 'coping' for specific groups of women, including Indigenous women, who live in rural and remote areas. Assuming 'help seeking' and 'coping' is the same for all rural women experiencing domestic violence will overshadow the nuances of gender, class, indigeneity and other identities, and how they intersect with different degrees of isolation.

This project uses a mixed-method design and includes the active participation of four service providers - Centacare South Australia; Department of Child Protection, Western Australia; Aboriginal Family Law Services, Western Australia; and Anglicare Western Australia - to enable women to tell their stories of seeking help and coping with domestic violence.

This project involves four diverse regions in Western Australia and South Australia, reflecting varying degrees of remoteness, different primary industries, and includes different Indigenous communities. The project design has three stages including analysing agency statistics and collecting primary data with women and human service workers.

This project will provide evidence about how domestic violence services can better serve the needs of women who are socially and geographically isolated. The outcomes will enhance service provision for local communities but also serve as a platform to develop knowledge more broadly about what support, information and services are most effective in helping women living in isolation.

### Principal chief investigator

Associate Professor Sarah Wendt, School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy, University of South Australia.

### Chief investigators

Associate Professor Lia Bryant, School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy, University of South Australia; Professor Donna Chung, School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Curtin University; and Dr Antonia Hendrick, Lecturer, School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Curtin University.

### Research partners / team members

Centacare South Australia; Department of Child Protection, Western Australia; Aboriginal Family Law Services, Western Australia; and Anglicare Western Australia.

### Approximate project length 2 years

### Budget \$210,138



Associate Professor Sarah Wendt (far left) is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy at the University of South Australia and a member of the Research Centre for Gender Studies.

Desi Alexandridis (near left) is Senior Manager, Domestic Violence & Homelessness Services at Centacare Catholic Family Services in South Australia.

## Sidebyside

Partners on the ANROWS Research Program project *Seeking help for domestic violence: Exploring rural women's coping experiences* (see opposite), Associate Professor Sarah Wendt (above left) and Desi Alexandridis (above right), speak with us about how their project was conceived and why collaboration between researchers and service providers is so important.

**SW** My background is in social work and I have always been passionate about promoting the best interests and safety of women and children.

As an undergraduate student I remember writing essays on domestic violence whenever I had the opportunity. I worked in crisis response as a social worker assisting women and their children leaving violent relationships before embarking on a PhD that explored rural women's experiences of domestic violence.

I grew up on a farm and experienced being part of a rural community. Hence, I was keen to highlight the unique issues women faced when experiencing domestic violence in a rural context.

As a researcher I have had the privilege of speaking with diverse communities of women about their experiences of domestic violence. I have always felt it is women's stories that have enabled me to say important things about gender and how gender hides, silences and perpetuates domestic violence.

Professor Donna Chung was one of my earlier supporters, encouraging me to explore domestic violence in rural communities for both my honours and PhD research. This research project has enabled us to collaborate on a topic we have long shared an interest in. Similarly, Associate Professor Lia Bryant is a well-known rural sociologist and her work on gender has assisted my research in the past. I am absolutely thrilled to have them both on my research team.

I always envisioned this research to be a partnership between researchers and service providers. Due to previous successful working relationships with Centacare, who fund and support domestic violence services in rural South Australia, I met with managers from all the different rural sites in South Australia to discuss the project. I received their clear endorsement to explore women's help seeking, disclosure and reporting on domestic violence.

Professor Donna Chung went through a similar process with service providers in Western Australia. All service providers

agreed that it was important to include women from their communities in the project and committed to assisting us in facilitating that process. The excitement and goodwill to explore service provision and support women's participation in the project was evident from the beginning.

This project examines how social and geographical isolation can impact on 'help seeking' and shapes 'coping' for specific groups of women living in rural and remote areas. Research (including my own) has shown that to understand 'help seeking' and 'coping' challenges for Aboriginal women experiencing family violence, it is essential to understand colonisation and its enduring and ongoing impact on Aboriginal communities, families and individuals. Cultural safety is an important theme and we need to continue talking about it.

In this project, we will explore with Aboriginal women their reasons for seeking help, how they sought assistance and what shaped their decision making. We will also look at how they have coped with family violence in their lives,

including periods of time where they did not seek assistance, and what influenced their decision to cope alone.

Guided by the NHMRC *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* in the development of ethical relationships, I recognise the importance of promoting local relationships to ensure the nuances of judgement and practice and to help promote trustworthiness.

My research team will use the platforms of local agencies (Centacare, Department for Child Protection and Family Support, Aboriginal Family Law Services, Anglicare WA in Derby) to be introduced to local Aboriginal groups (as opposed to cold calling). It is vital that the research design meets the needs of Aboriginal women.

We will work closely with our agency partners to harness local Aboriginal expertise and ensure cultural sensitivity. We will be guided by Aboriginal women and workers to find the best way to interview Aboriginal women and include them in the study.

I have long held the belief that relationships between researchers and service providers make meaningful contributions to the evidence base on violence against women and their children. As a researcher I believe in drawing on the expertise and practice wisdom of service providers to enhance knowledge, understandings and build bridges across a range of disciplines. Collaboration is pivotal in enabling translations of research into practice and policy.

**DA** I grew up in Port Lincoln in South Australia and began my career in Whyalla. I started my career nearly 30 years ago and it began as a personal journey. I had close friends who had experienced domestic violence and my mother and I had been involved in supporting them. When the opportunity of a professional position came up (I didn't have the training at the time), I applied for the position and got it. My

passion continued to grow as I worked with women experiencing domestic and family violence and saw the positive outcomes our collective work was able to produce.

A deep sense of social justice continues to drive me, as does my sense of needing society to be equal and for women to have the opportunity to live free from violence. I want children to grow up knowing and seeing positive relationships, rather than viewing the world in distorted ways. I want children to grow up feeling safe and knowing that there is an alternative to violence. This keeps me in the job!

The idea of this project actually developed quite fortuitously. I work at Centacare, where we have various domestic and family violence programs catering to different groups of women. One of our program colleagues had initial conversations with Dr Sarah Wendt about partnerships and potential projects. Our interest in her proposed project grew as we learned more about it, and realised how worthwhile it could be.

This project is hoping to answer how social and geographical isolation impacts on service delivery in rural and remote areas. We are also interested in analysing what shapes 'help seeking' and 'coping' for specific groups of women. In my experience, the lack of services is the biggest challenge we face in rural and remote areas. In order to have positive outcomes in these areas, you need the availability of services.

The issue of geographical isolation in rural and remote areas is complex and more so with Aboriginal women. Not only are culturally responsive services few and far between, services also have the challenge of learning how to deliver services that honour kin and family obligations within Aboriginal communities.

Working with Aboriginal women, especially younger Aboriginal women, I have found that social and cultural responsibilities within the family and kin context are a challenge for them to

seek help. It also impacts on their ability to stay within the service after seeking initial assistance. Younger Aboriginal women feel obliged to tell their families and broader networks where they are and who they are seeking assistance from. As service providers, we need to recognise the importance of family obligations while keeping Aboriginal women safe in culturally secure ways.

When working with Aboriginal women, it is crucial to have a good understanding of cultural heritage, as well as empathy towards past, current, lived and vicarious trauma. We must be attuned to the experience of colonisation, the cultural memory of the stolen generations, and Aboriginal women's experiences with government departments such as Child Protection.

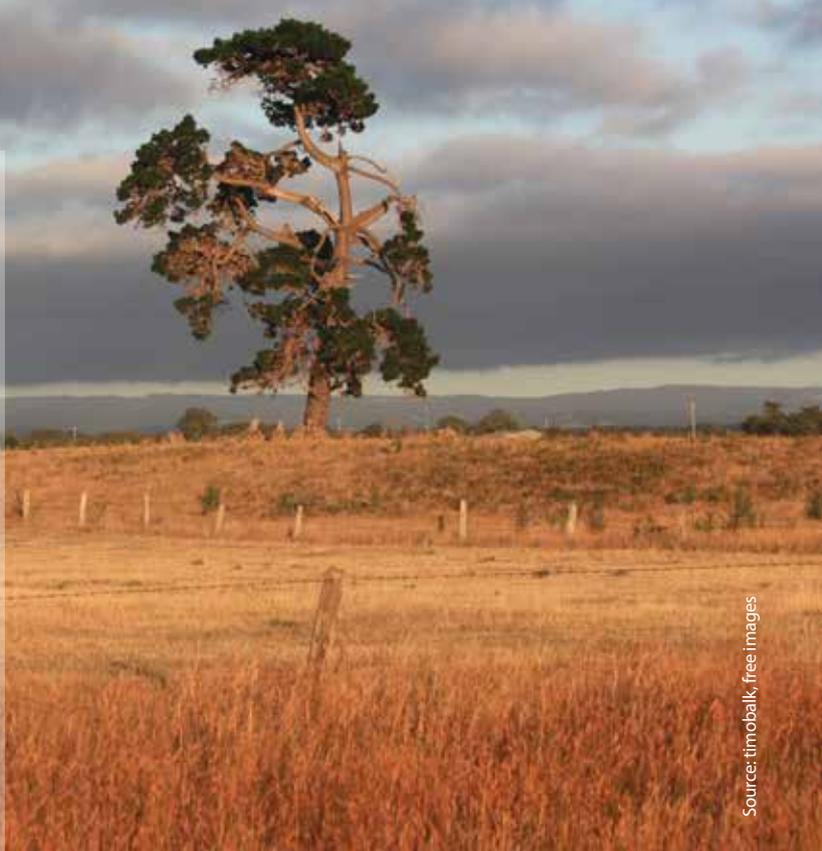
We also have to be flexible in our service delivery. Aboriginal women don't have to fit our domestic violence service model, we need to fit within their experiences of violence. Some of our services have worked to come up with innovative solutions grounded in culturally responsive practices. For example, in our outreach with younger Aboriginal women, we have allowed families to stay at the properties. Normally our policies and process for outreach programs do not allow for families to stay with survivors/victims. We made exceptions for Aboriginal women so they can stay with their mothers, sisters and aunts.

We work very closely with Centacare's team of cultural consultants, drawing on their knowledge and bringing them in at a practical level to advise on culturally responsive and secure service provision.

I have always held the view that it is imperative to have partnerships between service providers, agencies, and researchers. As service providers, we develop our service delivery models on evidence. We welcome opportunities to work with researchers, as together we are able to develop best practice models for working with women experiencing violence. ●

# Spotlight

*Our story to tell:  
Aboriginal  
perspectives on  
domestic and  
family violence.*



Source: timobalk, free images



This is a revised version of an ANROWS Board discussion paper authored by ANROWS Board Director Victoria Hovane. The paper focuses on Aboriginal perspectives on domestic and family violence.

*This paper is primarily written in the context of research and knowledge gained from work with Aboriginal communities in WA. The applicability of its contents for use with other urban, regional and remote communities and the peoples of the Torres Straits need to be verified.*

**Conceptualisations of domestic and family violence (DFV) in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities are different to prevailing dominant western theories of domestic and family violence. It has a different background, different dynamics, it looks different, it is different. It needs its own theoretical discourse and its own evaluations.**

In addition, it is critical that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a strong and independent voice in social policy as First Nations Peoples of Australia, and are not positioned in the 'special needs' category, with Gay, Lesbian, Intersex & Transgender communities, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, and People with Disabilities.

## The National Plan context

*Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009-2021* acknowledged that diverse responses are needed for women who also live with "... the trauma of race-based oppression, alienation and intergenerational trauma"<sup>1</sup>

The National Council noted that amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, there is a preference for the term 'family violence' which provides greater flexibility for describing "...the matrix of aggressive behaviours that centre around family relationships."<sup>2</sup>

In this context, family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities may involve:

- the perpetrator being an individual or a group
- the victim being an individual or a group
- the term 'family' meaning extended family, which more technically means a kinship network of discrete intermarried descent groups and, in many cases, 'family' may constitute an entire community
- the 'community' being remote, rural or urban; its residents living in one location or dispersed, but nevertheless interacting and behaving as a social network
- the violence constituting physical, psychological, emotional, social, economic and/or sexual abuse; and
- acts of violence continuing over a long period of time.

1 Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and Children, 2009-2021. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, p79.

2 P Memmott, R Stacy, C Chambers & C Keys, Violence in Indigenous Communities, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Canberra, 2001. In Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and Children, 2009-2021. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.

As noted above, understanding DFV in Aboriginal communities goes beyond individualised women's experiences. Indeed, there is an urgent need to move beyond definitional concessions that accommodate the term *family violence*, which are often applied as a superficial means of capturing real and substantial cultural and structural differences in how this problem is understood and manifests itself in Aboriginal communities. There is an urgent need to address erroneous beliefs that everything else is the same as mainstream conceptualisations of violence against women, and by extension that policy and practice is the same, and all that is required is a tweak here and there. What is required is a systems-wide understanding of the pervasive racial inequality inherent in Aboriginal and non-Indigenous relations in Australia, which continues to play a significant role in undermining effective responses to DFV in Aboriginal communities.

### Clarifying the links between colonisation, oppression and violence today

*"... Aboriginal experiences of dispossession were not diasporic. They were never new arrivals to this country. Their country was taken from them. A complete set of foreign laws, institutions, peoples, economies, beliefs, rituals, diseases, flora and fauna simply dropped on them uninvited ... Aboriginal people have retained strong links with country, law and language. Culture for Aboriginal people is not a set of nostalgic reminiscences of a foreign place kept alive through cultural rituals but a compelling and immediate force in their lives; animate in the landscape around them and renewed on a daily basis through connection with kin, ceremony and ritual."*<sup>3</sup>

In this perspective, pre-colonisation Australia was based on tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal societies existing and surviving in this country. These societies were comprised of many organising systems such as:

- governance and rules
- law, justice, punishment & reparation
- science & technology
- economies & 'Foreign' Affairs including trade
- conservation & environmental management
- teaching, learning, education & training
- roles, jobs and responsibilities; and
- care and support

In the Kimberley region of Western Australia, Aboriginal people understand these organising systems as originating in two critical and inextricably interrelated concepts – Aboriginal Law and Culture. To clarify, Aboriginal Law is described as:

*"...the unchanging legacy of creative ancestors who formed the world in the Dreamtime...and established the all-encompassing moral and practical rules by which succeeding generations of Aboriginal people have lived for thousands of years...a complex system of governance which regulates people's social, political and economic lives... This knowledge is encoded within the Dreaming stories, ceremonies, song cycles, cultural activities and dances of all language groups in the region."*<sup>4</sup>

Aboriginal Law is stable and enduring. It comes from our ancestors and no individual person has the right to change it without careful consideration of other Law People.<sup>5</sup> Law also tells us about our norms, beliefs, expectations and rules for everyday living. However, unlike western laws which are codified in legislation, Aboriginal Law resides in Law People and Elders. So Law People and Elders, or their nominated representatives, need to have input into policy and practice. This is the proper way of including Aboriginal Law and Culture perspectives.

Associated with Law is Culture. Aboriginal people describe their use of this term as reflecting how they *apply* Aboriginal Law.<sup>6</sup> In this perspective, Culture may be subject to change in response to western influences.<sup>7</sup>

*"It's how you live, how you talk, how you just present yourself...So, our young people these days don't realize culture not only means ceremonial time..."* (Ngalu, Patsy Bedford, Bunuba, 2004).<sup>8</sup>

*"...it's tied up with relationships, skin groups and kinship. It also keeps us together, and that's one of the intangible things, one of the things we can't see but we feel. It binds us together and makes us know who we are...It helps us try to do the best things, to look at **how life can be lived with the proper dignity**."* (Kimberley Land Council, Crocodile Hole Report, 1991, author's emphases).<sup>9</sup>

Law and Culture is about well-being, dignity and the survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Important to understanding DFV in Aboriginal communities is that in Aboriginal Law, women and men have equally important roles and responsibilities.

*"...(W)e've got it strong boss womans. They got authority to say whatever, whatever we doing."*<sup>10</sup>

*"...I can't speak for woman. Brother and I, we work for woman, we do things for woman, but we can't touch their ground."*<sup>11</sup>

3 Blagg, H. (2008). *Crime, Aboriginality and Decolonisation of Justice*. Hawkins Press, Australia.

4 Kimberley Aboriginal Law & Culture Centre (KALACC). (2006). *New Legend: A story of Law and culture and the fight for self-determination in the Kimberley*. Fitzroy Crossing, WA: KALACC, p15-16.

5 Ibid.

6 Kimberley Aboriginal Law & Culture Centre (KALACC). *op.cit.*

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid, p 49.

9 Ibid, pp 49-50.

10 Ibid, p26.

11 Ibid, p26.

It is important to understand this because it provides an insight for those concerned about patriarchy. From an Aboriginal perspective, this is a non-Indigenous way and we do not claim it as such. Equality between genders is *embedded* in Aboriginal Law and no individual has the right to change that. While some individual perpetrators may choose to be selective in their observance of Aboriginal Law and perform acts of DFV, this behaviour has no basis in Aboriginal Law. Moreover, DFV does not equate with Aboriginal concepts of dignity in Aboriginal Law. From this perspective, it is clear that Aboriginal Law and Culture provide important opportunities for responding effectively to DFV.

When colonisation occurred in Australia, it included at least six key processes that have been identified in other colonising experiences.<sup>12</sup> It is important to articulate these processes which remain real and personal to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because of their profound effect on the social and emotional well-being and functioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their families and communities.

These processes included:

1. the coloniser denies the existence of a local culture and dismisses the legitimacy of indigenous legal and education systems, while also promoting the settler culture and institutions. Local languages are suppressed and the language of the coloniser is imposed on indigenous groups
2. the coloniser destroys local cultural artefacts and desecrates sacred sites. The culture is further decimated
3. the coloniser marginalises and denigrates local peoples. Traditional cultural practices are dismissed as being primitive
4. traditional cultural practices are tolerated in a limited manner in that some dance forms and songs are assimilated into settler society and in the process are redefined
5. the settler society draws selectively on elements of the indigenous culture (e.g., medicines and healing practices); and
6. the settler society exploits aspects of the indigenous culture for commercial gain (Enriquez, 1995 cited in Hodgetts, et. al., 2010, p.119).

The processes of colonisation were implemented through various oppressive mechanisms such as colonial violence and dispossession.<sup>13</sup>

*“Those simply shot were fortunate. Many were cruelly tortured, maimed, blinded, burnt and castrated... They were*

12 Hodgetts, D., Drew, N., Sonn, C., Stolte, O., Nikora, W. & Curtis, C. (2010). *Social psychology and everyday life*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.

13 Blagg, H. (2000). *Crisis Intervention in Aboriginal Family Violence Report*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia and Gibbs, R.M. (1996). *The Aborigines (4<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. Melbourne: Addison Wesley Longman Australia Pty Ltd.

*shot for dog meat. Women were chained to the huts of white settlers, used by the men, then tortured to death, some being forced to wear the heads of their murdered husbands... Worst of all to the Aborigines was the perpetual theft of their children for sexual purposes, or if they were lucky, to be domestic servants.”<sup>14</sup>*

The sudden and violent deaths of important members in families and communities, the holders of Aboriginal Law and Culture,<sup>15</sup> had a profound impact on observance of beliefs, social customs, rituals and ceremonies. It resulted in Aboriginal rules and practices coming under intense pressure,<sup>16</sup> culminating in profound trauma, the modelling of extreme violence and brutality, and the overall undermining of Aboriginal societal systems and mechanisms for regulating behaviour (e.g., Law & Culture).<sup>17</sup>

Colonisation has meant the following for Aboriginal people:

*“Physical and ideological violence act in mutually reinforcing patterns such that physical violence establishes social domination and ideological violence legitimises and normalises oppressive social relationships and material inequity.”<sup>18</sup>*

Today, this status quo is maintained in our social institutions and practices which have racial inequality systemically embedded in the foundations on which agencies, and their policies and practices, are based. This includes policies and practices in response to DFV.

*“The Government’s ongoing approach is killing our people because the power and responsibility has been taken from the leaders and Elders” (Harry Nelson, Yuendumu, NT).<sup>19</sup>*

Against this background, it is not surprising to see high levels of violence in families and communities across Australia. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are overrepresented both as victims and perpetrators of all forms of violent crime.<sup>20</sup> One in five (20% or 20,900) youth reported experiencing physical violence, and of those 49% (10,300) were physically injured or harmed.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 35 times more likely

14 Harris, J. (1990). *One Blood: 200 years of Aboriginal encounter with Christianity: A story of hope*. Sutherland, NSW: Albatross Books Pty Ltd, p89.

15 Harris, J. (1990). *One Blood: 200 years of Aboriginal encounter with Christianity: A story of hope*. Sutherland, NSW: Albatross Books Pty Ltd.

16 Gibbs, R.M. (1996). *The Aborigines (4<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. Melbourne: Addison Wesley Longman Australia Pty Ltd.

17 Atkinson, J. (2002). *Trauma trails: Recreating song lines. The Transgenerational effects of trauma in Indigenous Australia*. Spinifex Press Pty Ltd: Melbourne, Vic.

18 Watts, R.J., Williams, N.C. & Jagers, R.J. (2003). Sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 31(1-2), 185-194, p186.

19 Cited in The Elders Report 2014, p36.

20 Martin, D. F. (2009). *Domesticating violence: Homicide amongst remote-dwelling Australian Aboriginal people*. In Australian Institute of Criminology, Domestic-related homicide: Keynote papers from the 2008 international conference on homicide. [http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/C/C/3/%7bCC334155-D9E6-4635-84FB-32A81C3A3C69%7drpp104\\_003.pdf](http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/C/C/3/%7bCC334155-D9E6-4635-84FB-32A81C3A3C69%7drpp104_003.pdf) Retrieved 6 August, 2013.

21 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), (2010). *Framework for Measuring Wellbeing: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2010, Cat. No. 4703.0*.



to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are 21.4 times likely to be hospitalised than non-Indigenous females and males.<sup>22</sup>

The most recently available data on homicide victimisation highlights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are again overrepresented, where the rate is four times higher than among non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>23</sup> Closer examination of data reveals that just over half (55%) of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homicide victims were killed in a domestic homicide, of which the most common subcategory was intimate partner homicide.<sup>24</sup>

These data suggest that the picture of DFV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is complex, and that it is important it is understood in the context of broader community cultures, values, attitudes to violence, social norms associated with violence, and general family and community functioning (for full description of some of these issues see chapter by Martin in AIC, 2009).<sup>25</sup>

The overwhelming dominance of concentrated legal intervention of DFV as the preferred approach to addressing DFV can be problematic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is because it occurs within the context of a historical and ongoing mistrust of the police, courts and justice systems, and the perceived inability of these systems to provide responses that meet the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Consequently, further research and development is needed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on these specific needs and what Aboriginal Law and Culture can offer.

## The social policy and research context

In terms of social policy and research, research suggests that we cannot consider issues such as DFV within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities without engaging with the fundamental issue of the racialised politics of voice. From this perspective “...racial power differentials...dictate which particular voices will be given space within public discourse.”<sup>26</sup>

This has largely been non-Indigenous feminist discourses.<sup>27</sup> In addition, non-Indigenous research and western psychological theories continue to dominate the offending and rehabilitation research and practice space.<sup>28</sup> But there is no empirical evidence known to the author at this time that these prevailing approaches are effective for dealing with DFV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Indeed, while a number of Aboriginal programs and services are reported as being effective in the literature,<sup>29</sup> the lack of independent evaluation of those programs and services constitute a significant gap in the empirical evidence-base on what works in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This is despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples having *their own story* to tell about DFV, *their own theoretical discourses* and their own *lived realities* about what it's like to experience DFV within the prevailing racially unequal systems in contemporary Australia.

*“Our people are living on the cross roads and the walk is a rough, rugged, cloudy journey to reach what the Government wants us to do. It's not our system, I'll tell you that. Some of us are lucky to learn that. Where do we go after that? We are still a separate people. You are there. We are over here. **You don't want to know our way and we are given no choice but to go your way**” (James Gaykamangu, Millingimbi, NT, author's emphases).<sup>30</sup>*

22 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services Provision (2009). Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators Report. [http://www.pc.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/90129/key-indicators-2009.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/90129/key-indicators-2009.pdf). Retrieved 6 August 2013.

23 Chan, A. & Payne, J. (2013). *Homicide in Australia: 2008–09 to 2009–10 National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report*. AIC Reports Monitoring Reports 21. Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Criminology. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/mr/21-40/mr21.html>. Retrieved 1 November 2014.

24 Ibid.

25 Source: [http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/C/C/3/%7bCC334155-D9E6-4635-84FB-32A81C3A3C69%7drpp104\\_003.pdf](http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/C/C/3/%7bCC334155-D9E6-4635-84FB-32A81C3A3C69%7drpp104_003.pdf). Retrieved 6 August, 2013.

26 Riggs, D.W. (2008). White mothers, Indigenous voices and the politics of voice. *Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association e-journal*, 4(1) <http://www.acrawsa.org.au/files/ejournalfiles/62DamienRiggs.pdf>. Retrieved 3 May 2013.

27 For example, see Nancarrow, H. (2006). In search of justice for domestic and family violence. *Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian women's perspectives. Theoretical Criminology*, 10(1), 87-106.

28 Jones, R., Masters, M., Griffiths, A. & Moulday, N. (2002). Culturally relevant assessment of Indigenous offenders: A literature review. *Australian Psychologist*, 37(3), 187-197.

29 Cripps, K. & Davis, M. (2012). Communities working to reduce Indigenous family violence. Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse Brief 12. <http://www.indigenousjustice.gov.au/briefs/brief012.pdf>. Retrieved 3 March 2013.

30 Cited in The Elders Report 2014, p52

## Centrality of culture: Lessons from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health field

The National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Plan reflects the most up to date policy and practice perspectives from across Australia.<sup>31</sup> As such, it has important lessons for the DFV field through its recognition of the centrality of culture for promoting the social and emotional wellbeing and health of Australia's First Nations Peoples. In its Recognition Statement, the Health Plan recognises that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the first people of Australia
- the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are dynamic and continue to evolve and develop in response to historical and contemporary circumstances
- dispossession, interruption of culture and intergenerational trauma have significantly impacted on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and that they share a continuing legacy of resilience, strength and determination
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are diverse in gender, age, languages, backgrounds, sexual orientations, religious beliefs, family responsibilities, marriage status, life and work experiences, personality and educational levels; and
- contributions that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to generating new ideas and innovative solutions to improve health are very valuable<sup>32</sup>

Importantly, the Health Plan highlights that wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people incorporate broader issues of social justice, equity and rights. This includes addressing systemic racial inequality.

It also highlights that culture can influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' decisions about when and why they seek health services, their acceptance of treatment, the likelihood of adherence to treatment and follow up, and the likely success of prevention and health promotion strategies. Similar decisions and responses by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders may be observed in relation to DFV. Not surprisingly, the Health Plan suggests that ensuring the cultural competence of service providers can lead to more effective service delivery and better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Importantly, the Health Plan suggests that Culture, in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context, needs to be differentiated from the supposedly cultural excessive

behaviours that can have a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of people, their families and communities. These excessive behaviours such as DFV have no basis in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Indeed it is the restoration and continuation of cultures which provide both the reason for change, and the pathway for securing it.<sup>33</sup>

Here again we can reference the strengths and opportunities provided by Aboriginal Law and Culture. It provides a pathway for achieving positive environments in which communities and families stand in support of those experiencing DFV, to curb the behaviour of perpetrators. Implicit in Law and Culture is gender equality, as well as a culturally relevant behavioural template which does not endorse DFV. This template may be used to respond effectively to DFV, as well as culturally relevant consequences for those who do not follow the rules required under Aboriginal Law and Culture.

Unfortunately, these important opportunities continue to be ignored as a result of prevailing systemic racial inequalities, and Aboriginal people continue to experience serious harm as a result of violence including DFV.

## Concluding remarks

Despite experiences with colonisation and oppression, many Aboriginal people continue to retain a connection to Aboriginal Law and Culture and identity. If theories that describe DFV are to be relevant, and if responses are to be effective, they must be grounded in this Law and Culture. By its very nature, Law and Culture is about well-being, dignity and the survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. DFV does not equate with dignity in Aboriginal Law.

Instead, Aboriginal Law and Culture offers opportunities for creating safe communities of care in which every person has an important role in curbing abusive behaviours like DFV. Such an approach is strengths-based, it reminds Aboriginal people about important roles, responsibilities and obligations, and the strength of Aboriginal Law and Culture. Embedded in this approach is a fundamental rationale and motivation for changing DFV behaviours, as well as pathways to achieving community safety. Once understood, Aboriginal Law and Culture provides insights into options for cultural solutions and importantly, it gives cultural permission to have healthy boundaries and to live without violence and abuse. ●

31 Source: National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023. [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/2B39FA14C286E3EECA2579E800837B5F/\\$File/health-plan.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/2B39FA14C286E3EECA2579E800837B5F/$File/health-plan.pdf) Retrieved 6 August 2013.

32 Ibid, p10.

33 Ibid, p11.

# Sidebyside

We speak with the partners of ANROWS Research project *Advocacy for safety and empowerment: Good practice and innovative approaches with Indigenous women experiencing family and domestic violence in remote and regional Australia*.

*How did the idea of this project develop?*

**JP & RH** We have had previous relationships with the three partners and the three locations. Each of the women's specialist services is community-based, long established in their respective communities, and influenced by progressive political values. We had seen them experiment with, implement and try to figure out a wide variety of different engagements alongside and with Indigenous women. That is, the services with Indigenous women have tried to carve out a social and political space for dialogue with each other.

We were keen to work with the partner services to further develop a special sort of 'space for action' where really challenging issues about violence and identity, and ways of doing self, family, community and future, are explored, contested, argued about and so on.

**DW** One of the core questions all organisations must ask themselves is "Is what we are doing working?" This has been difficult in central Australia as we have few services to benchmark against or to easily compare with our own. It is also tempting to look only at the differences, the otherness of violence against Aboriginal women, rather than looking at what, from a feminist

framework of service, does work and is working. Most project evaluation is myopic, it looks purely at outputs rather than outcomes. This project was born from a need for big picture foundational research, from which we can launch more nuanced program evaluation.

*You have dedicated your career to responding to and preventing violence against women and their children. What brought you here?*

**MW** A commitment to and passion for social justice and equity, with recognition that the majority of those subjected to gender-based violence are women and children and that this has a significant impact on their access to social justice and equity. This was highlighted to me when working as a school teacher where I had the opportunity to see first-hand how challenging it was for children to achieve and develop as 'whole' individuals when they were living with and experiencing violence in the home.

The women, their mothers, struggled to meet the most basic of family needs with the constant threat of violence and actual violence that would at times uproot the family to seek emergency shelter and safety. I wanted to be able to work with the whole family so I found my way to the ACT Domestic Violence Crisis Service.

Dr Judy Putt (JP) is Adjunct Senior Lecturer at the University of New England.

Dr Robyn Holder (RH) is a Research Fellow at the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice & Governance at Griffith University.

Dale Wakefield (DW) is Coordinator of the Alice Springs Women's Shelter.

Andrea Mason (AM) is Coordinator of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Family and Domestic Violence Service.

Mirjana Wilson (MW) is Executive Director of the ACT Domestic Violence Crisis Service.

**AM** I arrived in Alice Springs to work for Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council in July 2008. I was aware of the Council's reputation in working to reduce the devastation of petrol sniffing in central Australia. For most of my career I worked in the South Australian and Australian Public Services delivering projects and initiatives aimed at strengthening Indigenous governance and leadership and access to employment.

Since commencing in NPY Women's Council I have seen that domestic and family violence in the NPY region is a major corrosive element that is undermining all good gains and outcomes that are being achieved by the women of our region.

If we want to see lasting change, as a region, we must reduce this issue of domestic and family violence to such a point that other empowering services and initiatives can be embedded into, reconstruct and even transform our communities. Developing strategies and approaches to allow men to support other men in addressing their personal use of violence against women is also a key future strategy that requires a population wide approach.

*As per the project outline, the project will focus on Indigenous women's perspectives of outreach, advocacy and safety planning in remote and regional women's organisations. How will your research approach these three key service challenges?*

**JP** Part of the project will involve working with our partner services to consider how they have met these key service challenges. How have the services been influenced by Indigenous women as clients, staff, Board members and community members? What has helped and what hasn't helped? How can knowledge be consolidated, improved upon and shared?

**RH** Another component of the project will ask what modes and types of 'tool' (or method) might be developed by and with Indigenous women in different contexts to self-assess, prioritise and provide feedback to service providers, and which might be replicable?

Furthermore, it will ask which features of women's specialised services - within a wider struggle for Indigenous self-determination and rights - are important to Indigenous women, which are not; and why and how are they important.

*What are some of the vitally important culturally responsive aspects of researching/working with women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?*

**DW** The key to researching in Central Australia is to allow enough time and space to have meaningful conversations that are unhurried, and that conversations are allowed to take their own direction. We need to be mindful that we do not impose linear processes onto circular conversations.

**MW** Many Aboriginal women in the ACT have spoken of 'research and consultation fatigue' when research has been conducted with them. It is also important that there is a sense that the research will somehow make a difference and that any recommendations can be realistically implemented.

**RH** Yes, the services and researchers will be working with their existing networks, existing relationships, and with existing skills and capabilities to strengthen local knowledge. At the same time, the research will be a re-assessment of practices, of existing evaluation and feedback tools. It will ask: "Can these be developed further? Are there other ways in which Indigenous women can participate in shaping and leading the responses they want?"

Central to the project will be consideration of Indigenous women's perspectives on what is successful support in response to family and domestic violence, for what circumstances and contexts; and how they have changed, or have remained constant, over time.

**AM** NPY Women's Council was formed on the principle that women have something to say about caring for our children and families, about our aspirations to have good lives. This commitment to be honest and consistent in our conversations and advice are important aspects of the Council's approach to leading and leadership.

*How do relationships and partnerships between researchers and service providers contribute to the evidence base on violence against women and their children?*

**DW** Research exposes the fundamental core of your service by asking, "does it do anything?" This is a risky process that requires an existing relationship and the ability to develop that relationship in an ongoing, safe, and secure way. However, it also provides knowledge sharing and the ability to get fresh eyes on services that have existed for a long while. Through that creative tension comes growth and learning.

**RH** For the services as well as the researchers, this project creates an opportunity to do the research in a different way – each location is different but the challenges are similar.



*"Local knowledge and working with existing personal relationships and networks will guide how this project unfolds."*

Dr Judy Putt (pictured above)

The ANROWS grant has provided a rare opportunity for these busy services to have a closer look at what is happening on the ground, at the core of their services, in a spirit of mutual enquiry and shared commitment.

Of primary interest to the services is the question of how well they serve Indigenous women, and the engagement of these services with Indigenous women as clients, colleagues and community members. How are practices such as advocacy, outreach and safety planning working in these different environments and with the different interests and objectives raised by Indigenous women?

**AM** NPY Women's Council seeks to improve the lives of families, which means that every member of a family requires consideration and support. In this regard we look forward to re-setting or re-framing our approach to further improve our service model as well as to empower men in our region to speak to other men (and young men) about reducing violence against women. ●

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# inFocus



Michelle Deshong is Director of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service and Fair Agenda. She is currently based in Townsville where she is undertaking PhD studies in Indigenous Political Leadership. Michelle worked as a public servant for 20 years before moving into advocacy and academia.

Michelle is a Fellow, Australian Rural Leadership Foundation and an Accredited Cross Cultural Awareness Trainer – Cross Cultural Communications. In 2010 Michelle was an Australian representative for the NGOs representing Rural Women and Indigenous Women at the CEDAW negotiations in New York and the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in the following years. In March 2015 she will attend the next session of CSW as part of the YWCA Australia delegation.

*What have been some of the empowering and challenging aspects of your long career in working with women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?*

There are three things that stand out to me in terms of the challenges and the areas that have been empowering throughout my various roles in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Unfortunately the first one is the fundamental challenge of racism and discrimination in the Australian community and in the institutions in which we work, negotiate and advocate.

I grew up in North Queensland in the '70s and '80s which was a really difficult time in terms of racism. I guess that lit a fire in me about how to challenge these things when they present themselves. Even today as a forty year old woman with quite a degree of success, I still face racist and discriminatory stereotypes in most of the work I do. So I think that has been an interesting challenge but also a motivation. In particular it's the reason I'm a strong advocate for constitutional recognition and upholding human rights.

The second challenge has been working within bureaucracy. A large portion of my life has been as a public servant. For me, a motivation for working in the public service was empowerment, it was about doing good, being part of the decision making and having influence. But of course the challenge of this work is how complex bureaucracy can be and how slow progress can be. There are the realities of political parties, where persuasions of governments can quickly undo small pieces of progress as political environments change.

I'm very thankful for my time in bureaucracy because it helped me to be a better advocate on the outside. If you understand the system, you can work better with that system and the people working inside it.

Finally there is the challenge regarding women's empowerment and how it fits into work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, which has always been my identity. To think in terms of intersectionality, to say that within being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, we have our own identity as women, and the complexity of what happens for us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, has been a really powerful shift for me.

I would also note that that even though I may have been quite successful in my career, socially, economically, and at times politically, some of those statistics on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that we hear about impact on me and my family. I survived quite a significant domestic violence experience, which in some ways led me to my advocacy role. I wanted to ensure Indigenous women are heard and that there's a level of engagement and opportunity for Aboriginal women, that they will be protected as all women are protected.

*In your career you have worked in various policy, advocacy and academic roles. What have been some of the commonalities and differences within these roles?*

One of the really frustrating parts of trying to be a change maker, whether it is in policy, advocacy or academia, is how slow things happen. You might get some small wins but you need to find something to sustain you through the long haul.

For me that comes from ensuring that I am making a contribution to a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, whatever that may look like. That's the fundamental basis, everything I do from there is about whether my children will live in a society where the opportunities are better for them. We also don't want our communities to stay stagnant, we want growth socially and economically. Some of the social dysfunction can be really difficult to address but somebody has to take the lead. And that's my absolute passion.

As a public servant one of the things I found really interesting is the question about your own morals and values. When you find your workplace is crossing some of your boundaries you need to reassess where you need to be. One of the reasons I left the public service was that I felt morally challenged about some of the policies being imposed, from the outside, on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Moving into the academic role was quite refreshing. In academia you can be quite progressive in your thinking, your opinions are valid, and it's a different environment to work in. In the public service I found myself educating the people I worked with, in academia there's a different cohort of people who share similar viewpoints and nurture a strong, continuous development process.

*Have you had a favourite role?*

It's a really interesting question. Each of my roles has served an important purpose at a particular point in time. Right now, I feel as though I'm in the best place, I have the best opportunity to bring those skills together. I can move between each of those roles quite fluently, and that comes from 25-30 years of experience in Indigenous Affairs. My level of experience means I can now pick the things that I'm really passionate about and work on them.

*What are your thoughts on Indigenous ways of doing research?*

One of the challenges when I embarked on my PhD – and I had very supportive people around me to help make that transition from a public servant to an academic – was learning that there is a constant conversation that happens about Indigenous people in academia, and how we contribute to what we refer to as 'Indigenous Knowledges'.

At first I just thought "I don't want to get involved in this, I just want to write my PhD."

I guess I've learned along the way that the two areas are very much intertwined and it's really important to recognise that putting Indigenous Knowledges and ways of being at the core of research changes the lens by which you do research. We're now in a position where our communities don't have to be researched by non-Indigenous people, the research can be done by our own mob. It's also about those nuances, the things that you know innately that will guide the research and the way you can involve those relationships.

It's really exciting and I see my career heading towards that academic/research space, and continuing to think about putting Indigenous values at the core of research, and how that changes the culture of academia. There are many great Indigenous researchers who have written about this, like Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Bronwyn Fredericks, Karen White, Aileen Moreton Robinson, and Lester Irribina-Rigney

I guess this is where I am now, and I find it important to appreciate that it's a unique space for an Indigenous person in research to be working with their own mob.

*Can you tell us some of the complexities of being an insider researcher?*

The fundamental need for insider researchers is that for so long academic research has been about us and not by us. To me there has been a real shift in the recent past about how we work collaboratively.

Obviously there are pros and cons to both insider and outsider research. Some of the biggest questions for insider research relate to impartiality. I would say you can't ever be totally inside nor totally outside of research, so it becomes quite a fluid space of experiential learning. I was born

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an Aboriginal woman and I'll die an Aboriginal woman, but being an educator or a researcher can at times put me outside of the community I might be working with. It's about being aware of when you move in and out of those spaces.

The other thing is about relationships. More mature age people within our communities are becoming researchers which brings a lifetime of experiences, relationships, networks and knowledge. This can lead the research process but also raises the question of how you manage those relationships both pre and post research.

*Can you provide an insight into an Indigenous feminist perspective on violence against women and their children?*

When I talk about Indigenous feminism, to me the definition is that as Indigenous women it's ultimately our race and not our gender that forms the contours of our exclusions in a lot of ways.

Other feminist movements began by challenging the male dominated construct of our society. But we must also be frank, suffragette women left Aboriginal women behind and the discrimination our women have historically faced also occurred at the hands of white women. We were missing in this space around early feminism. That's not to say we didn't and don't have a voice within debates on gender inequality, but we note that what has impacted on our feminism more than gender has been racial discrimination.

To me the concept of Indigenous feminism is that we don't leave our men behind, but acknowledge that there's a particular space that Indigenous women have to occupy to find solutions and resolutions to community challenges. The complexity of Aboriginal kinship systems, the community model, means that addressing violence against women and children becomes more complex. When you look at the statistics, Aboriginal women are more likely to be hospitalised due to violence, they are more likely to be victims of violence by people they know or live with. But the social constructs within our communities can make intervening and reporting more difficult. We need to find solutions to the challenge of violence against women that don't involve complete removal from some of the safe and empowering structures afforded by our own communities, whether that's the man or the woman.

For some of our communities, violence in general is more prevalent. There's no excuse for violence, but the reality is that those social dysfunctions are a community based problem and require a community based solution. There are some learned behaviours that some people adopt in the belief that they have become cultural. For me culture is never an excuse for violence.

*What are some of the promising practices that bridge the gap between academia, policy and service provision on responding to and preventing violence against women and their children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?*

One thing I always say is that knowledge is power. This is fundamentally true to all aspects of the question you have posed. The main purpose of research is to increase knowledge and understanding of what the issue is and what potential solutions there might be. When people are informed and can make sound judgements and feel as though they can critique and analyse the information they have, they make much better decisions in the long run.

Thinking about some of the research projects that we want to see happen, what we're trying to achieve is better circumstances and outcomes for people in the community. Of course that research has to be conducted in an ethical and culturally appropriate manner, but it all comes back to knowledge. Increased knowledge leads to more power, greater awareness and a stronger advocacy position to influence change and make a difference to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

*In 2012 you attended the 57th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, as the Australian Government NGO delegate, whose priority theme was the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. How do international processes such as these influence domestic advocacy on violence against women issues?*

What's really interesting in the international space is that you get an insight into different people's perspectives, values, views and beliefs. That has been one of the fundamental learnings for me. In our own pocket of the world we can feel isolated, particularly depending on the government of the day, but when you get to the international space you meet other people, collaborate and gain allies.

Particularly in the 57th Session, we were strong and clear about having an Indigenous caucus, and we made sure our advocacy was successful and our lobbying points were included in the concluding observations specifically identifying the unique role of Indigenous women. That was a strong position to be in because once you have contributed to the concluding observations you have a greater opportunity to hold your government to account. It has enabled us to continue to remind our government of its obligations to address violence against women, but particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Some people say the UN is a bit of a 'toothless tiger' with no repercussions, but the effectiveness of international embarrassment and shame becomes apparent when you see countries that don't acknowledge the particular challenges for women.



Above: Michelle at the Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York (2010).

I would also say that these processes are not only about drawing attention to countries with really challenging policies relating to women, but also smaller countries like Pacific nations, who can work with countries like Australia to develop strong, equal, collaborative processes to ensure their issues don't miss out at larger forums.

*In March 2015 you are due to attend the next session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women as part of the YWCA Australia delegation. Can you outline some of the outcomes that are hoped to be achieved at Beijing+20?*

At the moment it's a complex situation because it is Beijing+20 as well as a carryover discussion of millennium development goals that were debated last year. It's an opportunity for a strong reflection on progress and a continuation of the conversation that gender needs to be a development goal in its own right. These will be some of the critical conversations.

Gender as a stand alone development goal has received significant advocacy because the evidence-base shows that so far progress has been slow. A specific goal would provide better focus and accountability for participating countries. From an Australian perspective the focus will still be on the elimination of violence against women, including cyberbullying and social media's complex contribution to

violence against women (including both facilitating violence as well as safeguarding against it).

One of the fundamental areas I will try to present is increasing the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in formal political roles and engaging with advocacy work. The presence of their voices in public and political representation is critical. I will also be presenting a session on Leading Peaceful Resolution - Indigenous Women at Beijing+20 with colleagues from around the world.

When we talk about intersectionality, as an Aboriginal woman I had to think about whether I focus my attention on Indigenous people and bring in gender or focus on Indigenous women and bring in culture issues. I made a conscious choice that I want to use the kind of conventions that exist for women and overlay that with the cultural aspects to have some positive influence in this area. ●

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# latestLiterature

Latest publications related to violence against women in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Bessaraba, D. (2015). [Changing how and what we do: The significance of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing in social work education and practice.](#) *Australian Social Work*, 68(1):1-4.

Cripps, K., & Adams, M. (2014). [Family violence: Pathways forward.](#) In Dudgeon, P., Milroy, H., Walker, R. (Eds.), *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice.* (Chapter 23) Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, West Perth, WA.

Jeffries, S., & Bond, C E W. (2014). [Taking the problem seriously? Sentencing Indigenous and non-Indigenous domestic violence offenders.](#) *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 17 Nov 2014. DOI:10.1177/0004865814554306.

Jongen, C., McCalman, J., Bainbridge, R., & Tsey, K. (2014). [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander maternal and child health and wellbeing: A systematic search of programs and services in Australian primary health care settings.](#) *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth* 2014, 14: 251. DOI:10.1186/1471-2393-14-251.

Lloyd, J. (2014). [Violent and tragic events: The nature of domestic violence-related homicide cases in Central Australia.](#) *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, No.1 2014: 99-110.

Maddison, S., & Partridge, E. (2014). [Agonism and intersectionality: Indigenous women, violence and feminist collective identity.](#) In Woehrle, L.M. (Ed.), *Intersectionality and Social Change - Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, Volume 37 (pp.27-52). UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

McCalman, J., Bridge, F., Whiteside, M., Bainbridge, R., Tsey, K., & Jongen, C. (2014). [Responding to Indigenous Australian sexual assault: A systematic review of the literature.](#) *SAGE Open*, 4:1-3.

Marchetti, E. (2014). [An Australian Indigenous-focussed justice response to intimate partner violence: Offenders' perceptions of the sentencing process.](#) *British Journal of Criminology*, 55 (1): 86-106.

Riel, E., Langedoc, S., Brown, J., & Gerrits, J. (2014). [Couples counselling for Aboriginal clients following intimate partner violence: Service providers' perceptions of risk.](#) *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 49(3): 1-22.

Tilley, N. et al. (2014). [On being realistic about reducing the prevalence and impacts of youth sexual violence and abuse in two Australian Indigenous communities.](#) *Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts, Special Issue: Evaluation*, 14: 6-27.



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