

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Indigenous youth and service provider perceptions of the availability and appropriateness of services to promote Indigenous youth mental health

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Introduction

Sixteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (hereafter respectfully termed Indigenous) Australian mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention government policy documents (2013 to 2018) have cited an urgent need for new responses to the high and increasing rates of Indigenous children's mental health problems and illnesses. The international literature suggests that such reform efforts are more effective when they engage with the providers and users of such services to co-design improvements. This presentation reports the findings of yarning circles with service providers and Indigenous young people in two communities.

Theory/Methods

Seven yarning circles were held with 34 service providers and 32 young people in two communities to explore their perceptions of the availability, appropriateness and integration of current mental health supports and services for Indigenous young people, and their suggested improvements. Youth yarning circles were facilitated by facilitators from an Indigenous youth empowerment group. The data were transcribed, analysed in NVIVO 12, and compared using grounded theory methods.

Results

In contexts of a high ratio of youth to adults in their communities and considerable mental health complexity, Indigenous service providers engaged in the research because they recognised they had ""not been able to get it right in this community...the actual model for our youth"", and were committed to improvement. Young people were not willing to approach mental health supports and services unless they were safe or trustworthy, and had clear suggestions for improvements.

Discussions

Key improvement suggestions were made at multiple levels. Service providers suggested the centering of a youth voice, increasing youth activities, family education, enhancing service available, appropriateness and coordination, and addressing the social and cultural determinants of youth mental health. Young people suggested information and awareness about mental health, identified and trained community gatekeepers, youth space and activities, online booking systems for services, and more support for recovery from mental illness.

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Conclusions

Engaging local service providers and young people in discussions provided needed support and direction to better respond to locally recognised needs. The suggestions will be fed into local co-design workshops to build Indigenous community-developed models of youth mental health promotion.

Lessons learned

The youth yarning circles gained momentum over the 18 month period and are likely to be sustained as a youth advisory group in each community primary healthcare service; and to serve as the ongoing core of the research project.

Limitations

The research is context-specific to two communities and findings may not be generalisable.

Suggestions for future research

The yarning circles form the first stage of a co-design and evaluation project with the two communities.