



Developing culturally appropriate mental health assessments for people with dementia in the Torres Strait



What is the focus of the research?

Developing culturally appropriate measures of anxiety and depression for older adults living with dementia in the Torres Strait.



Why is it important?

Rates of dementia in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults over 45 are up to five times higher than in the wider community. Given that 20-30 per cent of people with dementia experience

clinically significant levels of depression and around 15 per cent have clinically significant anxiety, there is a sizable (and disproportionate) population of older First Nations people experiencing anxiety and depression.

The existence of anxiety and depression make differential diagnosis of dementia challenging for clinicians, particularly given people can present with many of the same symptoms. For clinicians working in Torres Strait communities, diagnoses of depression, anxiety and dementia are even more challenging due to the absence of culturally appropriate assessment tools.

Misdiagnosis is common and has significant treatment and management implications. Late life anxiety and depression reduce quality of life, and are associated with declines in physical health, general wellbeing, and social and overall functioning. Early and accurate identification of anxiety and depression is crucial to ensure appropriate treatment is included as part of a dementia management plan. Having good measures is critical for this, but these measures must be culturally appropriate if they are to be meaningful for Torres Strait people.



How will this happen?

Stage 1: conduct yarning circles with community members, aged and health service staff, and community Elders to explore the dimensions of depression specific to Torres Strait Islander people.

Stage 2: using a specialised survey technique researchers use to gain consensus from experts, create an online questionnaire based on data from the yarning circles, focused on assessing a range of depression screening tools.

Stage 3: translate the selected, most appropriate, depression tool into Torres Strait Kriol.

Stage 4: pilot the tool within the Torres Strait and use a survey to evaluate its acceptability.



What will this mean for Torres Strait people with dementia?

- A more appropriate diagnostic experience for anxiety and depression.
- More accurate and timely diagnosis of psychological conditions that can occur alongside dementia.
- A more complete and personalised dementia management plan that takes into consideration all factors.
- Earlier intervention and better management of conditions.
- Better mental health and wellbeing.



What will this mean for the future?

- Valuable data which will form one part of a national longitudinal healthy ageing study (planned for 2022) to assess predictors of dementia in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



What are yarning circles?

Yarning circles are an important process within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. A yarning circle is the practice of speaking and listening from the heart, where the speaker is accountable for their truth, but supported to have the courage to speak it. It is a safe space for both the speaker and the responders.

A 'talking piece' is often used to help make it clear who is talking and who is listening. The person holding the 'talking piece' speaks from their own experience while the others listen with an open heart, without judgement or preconceived ideas.

Yarning circles are a way to learn from a collective group, build respectful relationships, and preserve knowledge through the act of passing it down.

They are a peaceful and collaborative way of communicating. They aim to encourage deep thought, honesty, self-expression, respectfulness, and the building of trusting relationships.



Who's undertaking the research?

Dr Leander Mitchell, University of Queensland

Dr Mitchell is a clinical psychologist and clinical neuropsychologist. She is a senior lecturer in clinical psychology at The University of Queensland's School of Psychology. Her research focuses on clinical areas, including carers for people living with dementia, management of behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia, financial capacity in people with dementia, and more recently, anxiety in Parkinson's disease and dementia.

The title of Dr Mitchell's project is *Developing culturally appropriate assessments for people with dementia living in the Torres Strait*.

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