



Australian
National
University

Chapter 11: Discussion

'The answers were there before white man
come in'

Stories of strength and resilience for responding to violence In Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander communities

CHAPTER 11

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent the oldest continuous civilisation on earth. We acknowledge the richness, strength and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. We recognise the uniqueness of each community and the commonalities between them. We also honour the contributions they make to humanity.

Family and community violence exists in all societies; it is most accurately and usefully viewed as being part of a complex system, influenced by historical, political, cultural, economic and social factors. These contribute to a 'cycle of violence' where trauma and exposure to violence may normalise and perpetuate that violence.

To answer the research question, 'What would it take to address family and community violence?' we sought evidence about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities experience violence. Our focus was on addressing family and community violence experienced and/or used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at the family and community levels. We define family and community violence as encompassing physical, sexual and emotional violence. This is consistent with contemporary understandings and is a broader definition than that used in most previous studies.

This final chapter draws together findings from the surveys, focus groups and interviews on family and community violence gathered from 18 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Many people generously shared their personal experiences. The report places their voices in the context of the existing research. We summarise what works to prevent and address family and community violence as experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Based on our findings, we present implications for action for communities, services, policy, evaluation and research. We also refer to relevant literature which offers solutions.

A systems and strengths-based approach

Progress towards reducing family and community violence can only be achieved where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities lead change. Strategies must be informed by their knowledge, experiences, needs and desires. It is critical to recognise the role of the broader context and system in generating violence and to place responsibility for reducing violence within that system. While family and community violence is 'everybody's business', actors within the system have various levels of power and influence; the greater the power and resources, the greater the responsibility to support positive change. Solutions will be most effective if they are designed and led by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, and if the solutions critically reflect the complex systems in which they are intended to operate. This contrasts with approaches which seek to blame or problematise individuals or communities.

At the heart of the expressed need from communities was the desire to strengthen community and culture and to prevent violence. Participants spoke of the need to heal families, through redressing the breakdown in kinship and family structures.

Protective factors

The experience and use of violence was lower in those with greater feelings of safety, lack of fear of their partner and no recent witnessing of violence. It was also lower in those reporting markers of lower levels of trauma, including those who did not have adverse child experiences, family members forcibly removed from Country, children taken away from a close family member, contact with the justice system and high levels of discrimination. Those with attitudes aligned with higher levels of gender equity were shown to have a lower risk of experiencing violence. Those not experiencing recent violence had better wellbeing, including greater life satisfaction, family cohesion, higher levels of happiness and lower levels of psychological distress.

Extent of violence

Family and community violence increases in contexts of intergenerational trauma, family and cultural disruption and economic and social disadvantage. It is a predictable outcome of colonisation and longstanding policies and practices affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This was recognised by community member and service provider participants and it aligns with published evidence. All 18 study communities

recognised violence as an important issue, impacting on those who experienced it and those who witnessed it. Those experiencing violence wanted the violence to stop and family disruption to be minimised. Eighty percent of CMS participants had not personally experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence in the past year. However, around half had ever experienced physical or emotional violence, and one in five had ever experienced sexual violence.

The study was not designed to produce population representative data; however, the level of violence reported in the CMS was broadly consistent with other data sources, including the ABS. The FaCtS study showed violence within the past year was occurring across urban, regional and remote settings. The study did not identify a higher occurrence of violence in remote communities than in communities in major cities or regional areas. This contrasts with common conceptions and representations, including in the media, that violence disproportionately affects remote communities.

The FaCtS study showed that women were more likely than men to ever experience violence from a partner or family member. Women were more likely than men to report family physical violence within the past year. Women were also more likely to experience sexual violence. Women were more likely than men to report frequent violence, potentially reflecting violence from within the home. When all types of violence were considered together, men and women were equally likely to report ever experiencing any type of violence. However, within the past year, more women than men had experienced violence. Men were more likely than women to experience physical violence outside the family.

Around three-quarters of participants reported never having felt violent, and the vast majority had never been arrested or convicted in relation to violence. Markers of use of violence were more commonly reported by men than women. The qualitative data indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people in the study communities were involved in using violence.

All age groups experienced violence and were affected by recent violence. Community members were particularly concerned about young people using and experiencing violence.

Catalysts and consequences of violence

Community members identified the broader, intergenerational links between trauma and the ongoing impacts of colonisation: inadequate housing, racism, financial stress, alcohol and other drug use, poor physical health and emotional and social wellbeing, unemployment, contact with the justice system and incarceration. One participant expressed the importance of these links:

The causes are a lot deeper, you know. They're a lot deeper, a lot to do with cycles of intergenerational trauma, seeing violence as you grow up as a kid. Alcohol just brings it out. Developing poor relationships with each other, the weakening of culture and add in issues about overcrowding, poverty, gambling, these compound the problem. So, without the right support and early interventions, educational programs, a lot of these cycles will just continue and just keep filling up that prison. And what you're doing, you're exposing a new generation of young people to all these same situations. So, the intergenerational trauma cycle continues.

Reflecting this, the CMS findings showed that the probability of experiencing recent family and/or community violence was lower in those with higher socioeconomic status and better general health and wellbeing. The experience and use of violence was doubled in those who had had welfare payments cut off or limited within the past year. Alcohol and other drugs were identified as key drivers, of using and experiencing violence. Those who had themselves experienced violence were more likely to be arrested or convicted in relation to violence. This is in keeping with other studies on the cyclical nature of violence within families and communities.

Services

The majority of those affected by violence did not *formally* report their experiences to service providers or the police. People were also afraid that reporting might lead to child removal, family disruption and incarceration of family members. Community members were reluctant to report violence because of a lack of services, and concerns about stigma, lack of trust and fear of reprisals.

Around forty percent *informally* told someone about the violence, usually a trusted community member, such as an Elder. Around one-third slept or stayed somewhere away from the source of the violence, and around one quarter received physical or mental health care. Young people were less likely to seek and receive help than other age groups.

Community members and service providers noted variation in service provision. They discussed barriers to engaging with services. These included a shortage of services, service accessibility, service capacity, a lack of community awareness of services, issues with transport, cost, fear of further violence, and lack of cultural

appropriateness. Short-term and insecure funding for services, burdensome reporting obligations, inflexibility and inadequate community engagement were also identified. Service providers spoke of the tension between the legal system – which was largely viewed as punitive – and the need to care for families in distress.

Participants emphasised the need for holistic, culturally safe services that are integrated and present appropriate pathways of care for those affected. They raised concerns about the ability of services in remote communities to meet the needs of those experiencing and using violence.

Service providers who were able to work well with other services felt better able to meet the needs of their clients. They noted the complexity of dealing with trauma and the need for trauma-informed services, especially in services which regularly see people affected by family violence. Training and ongoing supervision are important, but are often lacking.

Central to responding to violence is culture, including the involvement of Elders, and recognition and consideration of the role of traditional law/lore. A major theme was the need for service providers to engage with community members – regularly, and at community events – as a more effective way of providing culturally appropriate services. Racism and a lack of cultural safety were considered serious and ongoing problems within many services. Participants stressed the importance of employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at all levels within organisations and of respecting their leadership in design and decision-making. Services employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and having high levels of cultural safety provided a sense of ownership by, and support for, community members.

Study participants noted the need for services for women and families that were flexible and allowed families to stay in their homes. This extended to services for men – as offenders and as victims – which were said to be largely absent from the current system, and services to young people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs are diverse. Service providers require adequate resources for the range of services needed in their various settings.

Implications for action and solutions

The implications of the study findings are wide ranging and extend our current understanding of what works to prevent and address family and community violence. Improving services will have an impact, but it will be limited unless the underlying causes are addressed in tandem with the longer-term, broader issues. Much is still unknown, but some basic tenets stand as guidelines for future policy and program planning and delivery: a framework should inform action and solutions based on the broad levels of systems, primary interventions, early interventions and acute services support. Creating an overarching ecosystem is key. It must be a system that listens and learns and incorporates monitoring and evaluation processes. Change should occur within and between the systems level, the primary prevention level, the early intervention level and the acute services support level.(105)

An overarching ecosystem

Creating a system for addressing family and community violence that 'listens and learns' and generates ongoing solutions should involve programs that are created, implemented and led by local communities, based on community needs and priorities; that integrate the best current evidence and that are rigorously evaluated, using appropriate methodologies, to inform future programs.

Progress towards reducing family and community violence can only be achieved where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities lead change. A key required action is macro-level cultural change, leading to an overarching operating ecosystem that listens and learns and generates ongoing solutions for addressing family and community violence. It would be characterised by programs that are designed, implemented and led by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, based on community needs and priorities, integrating the best current evidence. They are rigorously evaluated, using appropriate methodologies, and so inform future programs.

Key actions at the ecosystem level include:

- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities lead change.
- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff hold leadership and decision-making (governance) roles.
- > Communities develop and implement local programs that meet their own needs.
- > Programs and policies are evaluated, to improve understanding about what works.
- > Programs and policies are adequately and sustainably funded.

What works in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Evidence about effective programs addressing the family and community violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is particularly limited. A recent review identified only two programs as having strong evidence of effectiveness. One of these demonstrated reductions in reporting of family violence following restriction of alcohol availability, and the other showed reduced reoffending following the use of a specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sentencing court.(3)

Program and policy design, evaluation and monitoring

Many programs are in place to support people experiencing family and community violence and to reduce its occurrence. However, few are rigorously evaluated. Learnings from highly promising programs are lost to the broader community when programs are cancelled, varied or replaced. There is little published evidence on what is likely to be effective. A critical component of funding programs and services is adequate resources to evaluate them appropriately. Sufficient time must be built in to conduct the evaluation, which must include a review of process, impact and summative approaches.

In June 2019, the Productivity Commission released an Issues Paper outlining a review to develop a whole-of-government evaluation strategy for utilisation by all Australian Government agencies for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In early June 2020, the draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy Report was released, describing how the Commission would address the findings of the review. It is reassuring that it reflects the findings and analysis of the FaCtS study, particularly in emphasising the need for evaluation and policy reform and the importance of the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in governance and leadership positions. The following excerpt from the Guide to the Report underscores these points:

For decades there have been calls to better understand how policies and programs are affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, there continues to be limited evidence about the effectiveness of many policies and programs ...

The Strategy is an opportunity to improve the quality and use of evaluations of Australian Government policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ...

To achieve better policy outcomes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be at the centre. What they value, their expertise and lived experience should be reflected in what is evaluated, how evaluation is undertaken and the outcomes policies seek to achieve.

... the Strategy needs to support more effective ways of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and include governance arrangements that embed incentives to learn from and use evaluation findings in policy decision making ... better policies, not evaluation per se ... will improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.(106, p.1)

Achieving positive change at ecosystem level

To create an overarching operation system that listens and learns, we commend the work of Wiradjuri researcher, Dr Megan Williams, who has developed the *Ngaa-bi-nya* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program Evaluation Framework. Encompassing World Health Organization evaluation principles and the Lowitja Institute Evaluation Framework components, *Ngaa-bi-nya* is designed by, and for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their contexts. It provides a comprehensive range of 'critical success factors' often not considered in other evaluations. It takes a strengths-based approach, within which it prompts us to consider the historical, policy and social landscape surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their contemporary settings. This includes their existing and emerging cultural leadership and the informal caregiving that supports programs and everyday lives. Rigorous in its foundations, *Ngaa-bi-nya* builds on Stufflebeam's context/input/processes/products evaluation model, a multi-method approach to conducting an integrated context, input evaluation, process and products ('impact') evaluation. It is one of few evaluation tools developed specifically to reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's contexts.(107) It prompts exploration and examination across four domains – landscape factors, resources, ways of working, and learnings – to provide an overarching operating system in which to generate insights for future development of culturally relevant, effective, translatable and sustainable programs for Australia's growing and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

Systems level

Systems need to improve their responsiveness in order to reduce the impact of family and community violence. Key actions at the systems level are at three sub-levels – policy, program and service provider.

At the policy sub-level, they include:

- > employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in leadership and decision-making (governance) roles
- > involving Elders in all decision-making, and ensuring that they are appropriately remunerated
- > shifting away from a 'one size fits all' approach to one that incorporates locally designed policies with locally based decision-making
- > addressing uncertainties surrounding program funding and externally enforced compliance requirements
- > addressing language barriers in all settings
- > employing Indigenous liaison officers, including in the police service
- > ensuring the cultural competence of non-Indigenous staff within all services, including in the police service
- > formal accreditation, such as Certificate III or IV, for training undertaken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community researchers
- > flexible services for families to allow them to stay together in their homes, where appropriate.

At the program sub-level, they include:

- > shifting away from a 'one size fits all' approach to one that incorporates locally designed programs with locally based decision-making
- > ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander designed and led programs and activities that are trauma informed, focusing on rebuilding kinship and cultural concepts and healthy relationships.

At the service provider sub-level, they include:

- > cultural awareness programs for non-Indigenous service providers
- > education for non-Indigenous service providers about the context of family violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- > accredited training for service providers
- > formal support services for service providers dealing with family and community violence
- > ensuring that service provision is integrated, through all services liaising with and working respectfully with each other
- > services for men, including in the context of services for families
- > services for youth, including in the context of services for families
- > training in mandatory reporting, according to requirements and categories in respective jurisdictions.

Examples of solutions at the systems level

The following examples offer some insights into activities effecting systems-level change:

Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project

An impact assessment of the Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project in Bourke, NSW, provides general information about changes at systems levels. The Justice Reinvestment approach aims to demonstrate that sustainable outcomes and savings can be achieved through redirecting funding from that of a crisis response involving incarceration of adults and youth as the only solution. Instead, these funds are relayed towards preventative, diversionary and community development initiatives that address the underlying causes – the social determinants – of crime. The Justice Reinvestment approach has delivered interlinked activities designed to create impact at different levels of the community and the justice system. This includes, importantly, Aboriginal leadership driving a grassroots movement for change among local community members, as well as facilitating collaboration and alignment across the service system, delivering new community based programs and service hubs, and working with justice agencies to evolve their procedures and behaviours towards a proactive and reinvestment model of community development.(104)

The Cowra Justice Reinvestment Project

This participatory research action project exploring Justice Reinvestment theory and methodology in Cowra, NSW, sought to gain understandings of the social determinants of incarceration within that community. (108) Within the broader framework of Justice Reinvestment as placed-based, an understanding of 'communities within communities' was important: it was emphasised that potential initiatives were not to be seen as the 'whole-of-community' observing an Indigenous problem. Instead, it was the whole (Indigenous and non-

Indigenous) community working together and observing issues affecting the whole community, including for its non-Indigenous members. In this way, the Cowra Indigenous community demonstrated leadership for the whole community. Further, community deliberations enabled stakeholders and researchers to estimate the total direct costs of incarcerating Cowra citizens for crimes which they, as a community, deemed 'JR-amenable' – that is, if there were community-based alternatives to imprisonment. In addressing the impacts of the formal criminal justice system in areas such as health, housing and employment, participants highlighted the need for comprehensive service mapping and service integration (e.g. mental health, drug and alcohol and sexual health), and a community partnership model to assist in avoiding duplication of services and to identify needs gaps. Other priorities identified were: (i) 'maintaining young people in education at all cost'; (ii) a suspension/homework and after-school activities centre; (iii) mentoring programs and employment and skills development; (iv) community transport, so that citizens, particularly young people, can access services; and (v) personal safety and housing, including emergency accommodation and halfway houses and/or hostels for adults and young people returning from detention.(108)

Primary prevention level

Some participants recognised that unhealthy relationships are sometimes viewed as normal; this was starting from an early age. Although participants identified recent improvements in awareness and understanding of family and community violence, the findings indicate the need for more understanding of what constitutes family and community violence. Key actions at the primary prevention level include:

- > education programs, starting at a young age, at individual, community and population levels that enhance understanding of family and community violence
- > education programs that are culturally informed on the roles and responsibilities for women and men
- > education and training about what constitutes healthy relationships
- > culture strengthening activities and programs.

Examples of solutions at the primary prevention level

The following three examples offer some insights into effective primary prevention programs and activities:

The Strong Family Program

The Strong Family Program was developed to deliver reproductive and sexual health education to Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. Development of the program was based on an extensive consultation process with Aboriginal communities and sought to ensure leadership and involvement from Aboriginal communities. Program content and delivery was based on Aboriginal pedagogy and reflected Aboriginal cultural values. It was implemented in three communities, with two groups from each hosting Aboriginal youth and Elders in a yarning circle within the culturally respectful frameworks of 'men and boys' and 'women and girls' business.(97)

The ARDS Family Violence Project

The ARDS Family Violence Project worked with Yolŋu (Aboriginal) people of north-east Arnhemland in the communities of Milingimbi, Ramingining, Galiwin'ku, Gapuwiyak, Yirrkala and Gunyajarara. The project built on previous education and resource development on family violence over several years, utilising the ARDS cycle of family violence radio plays and cycle of family violence poster 'nhaliy ŋayi ŋuli wiyin märramany', exploring parallels between family violence and the cycle of seasons. These were used in workshops to stimulate dialogue and discussion regarding this sensitive topic in a safe and non-threatening way, utilising the strengths and cultural knowledge inbuilt within the Yolŋu system of kinship (gurrutu). This project is seen as one that has been highly successful at stimulating cross-cultural discussion in a safe and trauma informed way that begins from where people are comfortable before moving to difficult topics in a safe way.(103)

Young Luv

Young Luv was developed by the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria. It is designed to encourage Aboriginal teenagers to think about healthy and respectful relationships at a stage in their lives when destructive patterns in relationships may have already been experienced or are becoming normalised. It engages Aboriginal teenagers in a culturally safe space where they can talk about and reflect on cultural strength, social media safety and the warning signs of controlling behaviours in relationships that so often lead to damaging experiences such as bullying and violence. The overarching message that emerged from the evaluation of Young Luv is that programs and initiatives which are designed to influence the attitudes and behaviours of Aboriginal teenage girls, such as Young Luv, must have the endorsement, approval and backing of the Aboriginal community.(96)

Early intervention

Any program or approach to reducing family and community violence needs to be underpinned by addressing intergenerational trauma. This requires being able to assess, and provide appropriate supports for, those affected by trauma. Key actions at the early intervention level include:

- > services and safe places for men, women, and young people, including in the context of services for families
- > services, including counselling, that are trauma informed and address intergenerational trauma
- > programs that are focused on building and assessing executive function.

Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable people to plan, focus and maintain attention, remember instructions and multitask successfully.(109) Disruption to the appropriate development of executive function is caused by various forms of adverse life experience, including family and community violence. Bad experiences can also disrupt brain architecture and alter (dysregulate) how people respond to stressful stimuli. For young children and adults facing serious adversity, it is possible to improve their likelihood of success across multiple domains throughout life, using programs that combine attention to executive function and to reducing the sources of toxic stress.(48,110-112) Such programs are not necessarily specific to addressing family violence; they are often more holistic and include family and community violence as a component.

Lessons learned from programs that have successfully fostered executive functioning skills hold considerable promise for incorporation into home visiting, parent and family support programs. The literature suggests several approaches. However, programs based on building executive function within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context are limited and would, therefore, require development. Some programs in Australia have elements addressing executive function and addressing trauma, but these have often been funded short term, and evaluation has been limited.

Acute services

There is a need for acute services to provide optimal treatment for both victims and offenders. Key actions at the acute services level include:

- > services that are trauma informed and address intergenerational trauma
- > increased high-quality, accessible mental health services and alcohol and other drugs services
- > development and implementation of tools for routine screening for experiences of, and use of, violence
- > access to information, transport, free child care and translators,
- > appropriate opening hours and emergency access
- > refuges that allow multiple children, older children and male children to be with victims
- > increased housing for homeless people and those exiting prison
- > family centred services, sensitive to the unique needs of men, women and young people
- > advocacy-based counselling for those currently experiencing family violence
- > greater engagement with community
- > respectful collaboration between services, in order to provide holistic care and appropriate pathways.

Examples of solutions at the early intervention and acute levels

The following three examples offer some insights into effective early intervention programs and activities:

The Family Wellbeing Program

The Family Wellbeing Program was developed in the early 1990s by a group of Indigenous leaders in Adelaide who had been affected by the Stolen Generations. It is enriched with material from complementary philosophies and empowerment principles and seeks to empower participants through personal transformation that involves harmonising physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of life and applying this to practical, day-to-day living. Evaluation of the program showed that participants became aware that, for social change to occur, they needed to play greater leadership roles and maintain a positive attitude towards the possibility of change. Evaluations of the FWB have also consistently shown that as people become empowered through participation in the program, they are better able to deal with challenges such as child safety, the criminal justice system, housing, and community governance issues.(113)

Red Dust Healing

Red Dust Healing is a specific cultural healing program written from an Indigenous perspective. It aims to engage Indigenous men, women and families to recognise and confront problems, hurt and anger in their lives, stemming primarily from rejection and grief. The program makes use of visual holistic learning modules, linking Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, to help participants with their individual insights and the journey of personal growth and wellbeing. It includes individual case management plans and ongoing support for participants through reminders of the Red Dust Healing tools. It also involves a 'train the trainer' component, training individuals to enable them to run the Red Dust Healing program with their own community.(114)

The Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program

The Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program (ANFPP) is a nurse-led home visiting program that supports women pregnant with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child to help them become the best mum possible. ANFPP mums are offered support and guidance during early pregnancy and on into their baby's infancy and toddlerhood. The ANFPP is an important early investment in the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in local communities. The program is a part of the Australian Government's commitment to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with particular focus on maternal health and early childhood development.(115)

A review conducted for ANROWS contains further information about appropriate models for addressing violence. In this study, Blagg et al concluded that Indigenous-led family violence initiatives usually share some common features, such as: Indigenous community leadership; willingness to work with and alongside men; building structures that are culturally, as well as physically, secure for women escaping violence and for those working within the organisation; developing policies and protocols intended to prevent lateral violence in the workplace; and developing trauma informed practice that acknowledges the intergenerational impact and legacy of government policies such as removing children from their families. Their work revealed that mainstream agencies and Indigenous women hold different notions of what constitutes an "integrated response", whereby mainstream practice focuses on an integrated criminal justice response that is designed to make the system more efficient and bring perpetrators to account, and integration occurs at the level of agencies. In comparison, Indigenous organisations look at integration in terms of a holistic response that focuses on prevention and integration with cultural health and healing families, with integration occurring at the level of place, with place-based responses beginning 'from the bottom upwards'.(40)

Study strengths and limitations

This report to government is not the only outcome of the study. The data belong to the communities. A critical step is to ensure that community members receive the study findings and can use them as they see fit. Chapter 2 outlined our original plan to visit the 18 participating communities with a draft report. After a few visits, this process was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, we are in the process of providing feedback via Zoom.

Our findings reflect contributions of community members and service providers from 18 communities across Australia. Another key strength of the study is the integration of qualitative and quantitative results with the published evidence to date, within a context of trust and openness demonstrated by the community members and service provider participants. This study was conducted within an action research framework, incorporating feedback and responses from participating communities.

While the study was not designed to be representative of the whole Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, the findings generally align with other available evidence. The data were cross-sectional and time-specific, so caution should be applied to interpreting causal relationships between observed factors. For certain outcomes, numbers of events were small, limiting statistical power. Any conclusions should consider both the estimates and their confidence intervals.

Conclusion

This Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed research report voices the experiences and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and service providers across Australia on family and community violence. The results highlight the imperative for a system that listens and learns. It emphasises the importance of community-led initiatives to break the cycle of violence and to generate ongoing solutions, informed by the best evidence and evaluated appropriately. The findings speak to the strength, cultural richness and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the enormous obligation and potential that all stakeholders have for building on these strengths to improve outcomes for current and future generations.

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